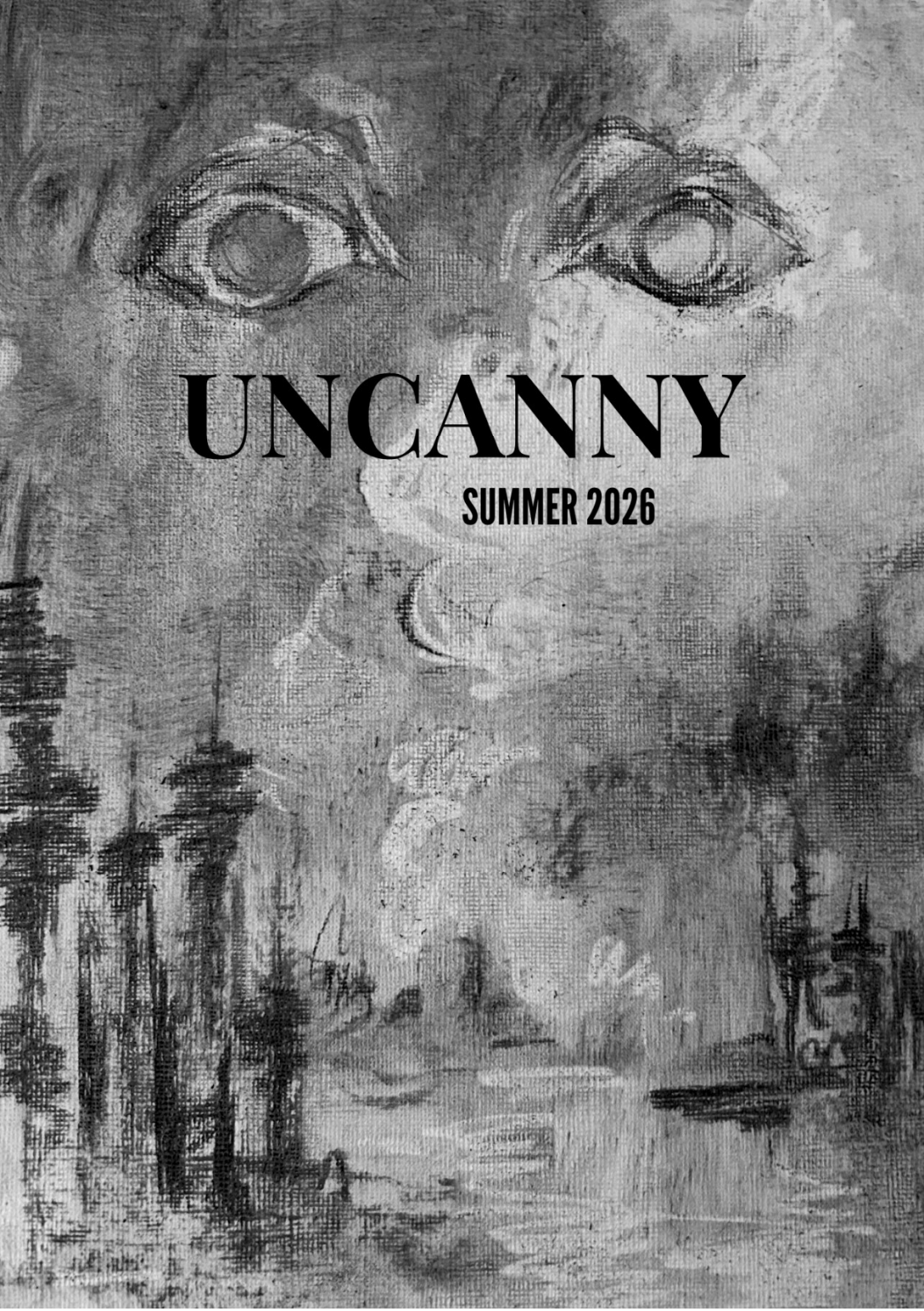




UNCANNY

SUMMER 2026

*This Summer 2026 issue of UNCANNY features art by
Emma Kurr (@emmytanno) and Molly Beckham
(@snailfodderpress).*

HELLO out there,

Welcome to the Summer 2026 issue of *UNCANNY*. This one's hot off the press – we are thrilled to bring you five more pieces of strange writing that will poke, prod and push you into the dreaded discomfort zone.

We are incredibly proud to publish these writers, and we would like to thank all our contributors for their generosity in sharing their work with us. We are continually delighted to be able to do what we do, and being able to choose the bizarrest of them all is a privilege.

This issue is the fruit of new creative collaboration – our previous team of three has grown into a monstrous nine-headed beast. Or we are seeing triple, who's to say? Perhaps this is why *UNCANNY* #13 feels particularly rich in tone, voice and style.

Whoever you are, wherever this finds you, we hope something snags. We hope you find yourself hearing echoes of a word, a phrase, a poem. We hope the beautiful work of our artists sticks in your mind.

Know that here, you are amongst the queerest of folk. Open your eyes. Listen close. Breathe deep. Enjoy.

Love,

The UNCANNY team

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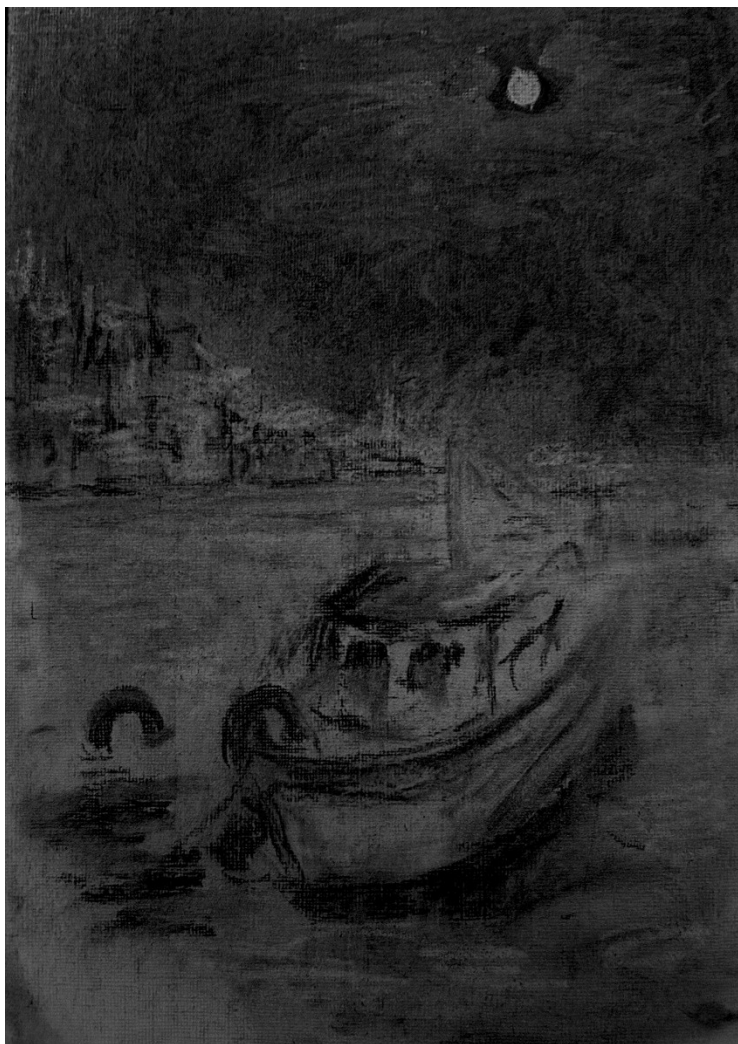
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@emmytanno

Orithyia

Heather Cruft



Moonlight parting around the mast casts a long line out to sea. The rising of waves sends the boom swinging out to port. With the fall, it swings back. Three gulls case the joint and move on to watch the butcher's son tip innards over the north harbour wall. We are in the back corner of the marina, by the mouth. The harbour lights go out. We turn in.

The waves have no shape through the porthole window. Dark smooths them like a hand over creased linen. I close the blinds and face the wall of my berth. Rain on the aluminium roof drips in sequence; two together (*pitter-patter*), silence, then *patter-pitter*.

The stone-cold breath of the sea blows down her companionway. *Up, down, up, down*. She cradles us above the black water. The *click-click-clicking* of hardware up the top of the rigging gets louder for a moment, then settles. The wind drops completely. For a moment we are motionless, then the rocking returns, faster now, *up-down-up-down-up-up-up*. I open my

eyes. We are rising. We are rising up out of the harbour and rolling forwards over the wall.

I grab the rails, hold myself to the mat, and gasp. It roars. Above— *below?*— a wave swells, up and up and never cresting, only rising, and sucking in buoys and the dinghies moored beyond the wall. They scrape against our keel and are pulled under. For a moment there is silence and we are weightless.

A shadow slithers past the window. I feel it slide through the scupper drains and it is in the bilges, joining the old water there. It bulges under the floor. *Push, recede, push, recede, push, push, push*, and then it is out. It is out and we are back behind the wall. I am up and the blinds are up and I can see the water retreating over the harbour wall. It sinks between the stones and is gone. The marina is glass again but I saw it this time.

The fishing boats go out as normal under red dawn, and pass the diagonal line separating the bay and the white-tipped lines of open ocean. Ships in the marina sit taller than last night. The stale water from their bilges now mingles with the waves foaming on the beach.

When the others get up I tell them what I saw and they look away.

*Only moonlight, they say, a trick of moonlight, and it
was the gulls you heard.*

Their eyes have rolled back into their heads and their
ears are waterlogged.



@emmytanno

Cállate

Robbie Pinkney



Maria is what I like to call plain-speaking. At least around us she is. Say you'd forgotten something in the house. If you came back to find it, and she'd caught you, she'd let you know exactly how big of an idiot you were. There's a lot of people nowadays that have this little voice in their head doing just that already, but with Maria? Hell, you wouldn't need it.

She always said she did it with love, which I guess was better than the alternative. And in fairness, she was never above getting insulted by us for mistakes she'd made as well. She always said she was the biggest hypocrite in the house, and a little exasperated 'Cállate' was all anyone needed to know that they were right and she was wrong. And it went on like that—or rather, it is going on like that.

She'd had a hard life, in fairness. It's not really my place to say what exactly happened to her, but I'll say this much: she hated men who were mean to her about as much as she needed those same men to fuck her. Whenever they did – always in their bedrooms, and never

her own – she could almost never stand to keep the lights on.

But two weeks ago, one of these guys wasn't having it; said he wanted her to be able to really look at him once she'd finished. She'd let him have his way, but she told me afterwards that she'd kept her eyes closed the whole time. I laughed, but the way her whole body seemed to go stiff when I did makes me think she hadn't been joking.

There was some silence, and before I could ask if my laughter had been in bad taste, she got up and said that she had to cook. As she left my bedroom and made her way down the stairs, I heard her talking again. I'd yet to close my bedroom door fully at this point, so I assumed it was me she was speaking to. Just as I was about to ask her about what she'd said, I heard the kitchen door slam shut. For a few seconds after that, I sort of just stood there, 'cause I could've sworn she'd said something in Spanish.



The next morning, it happened again. The walls between our bedrooms are paper thin, so when she flicked her light switch on, I heard her shouting, too.

'Callate!'

Still in bed, I shouted back that I was sorry for the snoring.

But she didn't reply.

The day after that, Maria, our other housemate Eddie, and I were hanging out in the kitchen. Maria was telling us about the Spanish village she grew up in, when suddenly she stopped mid-sentence. I asked her what was wrong, but she said everything was fine, and that she'd just forgotten something in the bathroom. As she went to leave, I made fun of her a little bit.

When we heard the front door open and close a few seconds later, I frowned. I looked at Eddie, who hardly noticed me at first. His gaze was fixed on the kitchen door, as if he had just remembered something else as well.

I didn't think too much of it until a few days ago. That's when it all came down. The rest of the house were sitting in the lounge, and Eddie asked me if I had time for a quick chat. I said yes and grabbed my bag of cashews before sitting down on the sofa beside him. As Maria sat at the table in front of me, staring at the floor, Eddie explained the whole, awful thing.

She'd been hearing things. Not like back when I'd moved in, and she'd sworn to us that she'd heard rats living under the floorboards. It was people, this time. She

knew they weren't real, but they were talking to her all the same.

Eddie was saying that we'd have to be there for her, until they went away, and I felt so stupid with my snacks beside me, like I was ready to watch a movie or something. Then he said that we'd have to keep the knives away from her. I swear to God, my throat had never felt so dry, my heart so still. I wanted to cry, but I couldn't with Maria there: her eyes shut, like whatever they were telling her was too loud and too cruel.

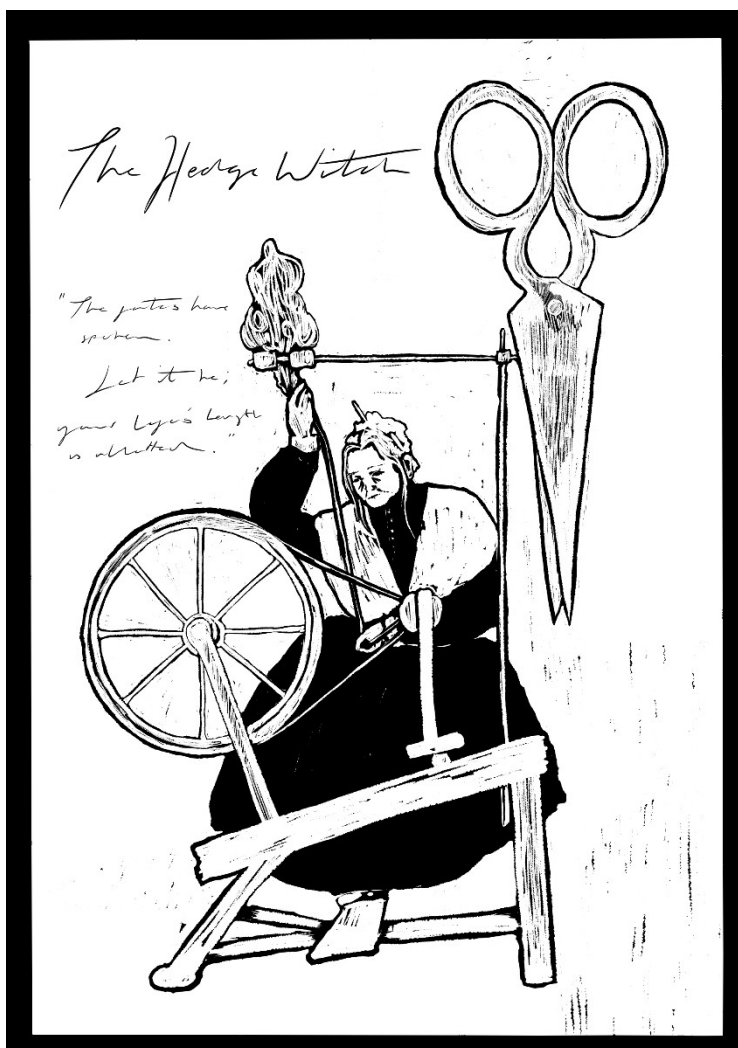


I hear it all the time now. We all do. We'll be in the lounge, talking about work, and she'll shout, '*Callate!*', again and again, twitching her head, and batting her hands at nothing at all. But it's not nothing to her. At first I didn't know if she was talking to one of us or one of them, and even when I learnt to look out for the signs, it still made me jump. Eddie talks around it like the word never left her mouth. He'd lived with Maria for a long time before I'd arrived, and to hear him tell it, this was pretty mild.



Last night I had to cut the tortilla Maria had made herself because she was too busy sitting in the corner of the room, trying to get one of the voices to shut up. All the while, I kept wondering if I was cutting it right. Was it supposed to be triangles or squares? Rectangles or circles? Curvy or straight? When I'd finished, the thing looked like a Picasso painting. Maria got up and glanced at it. As I put the knife away, she asked me if I'd ever cut a thing in my damn life, which made me feel a whole lot better. Just before she was about to sit down and eat, I asked her, with a lot of polite prefacing, if this voice sounded like her father. She laughed and told me Eddie had asked her the same question.

I didn't say anything after that, and neither did she. When I saw her reflection in the lounge, eyes closed, lights on, I almost felt like telling him to shut up myself.



@snailfodderpress

The Hedge Witch Seals My Fate

Claire Cunningham



It was high summer, and she was decked out accordingly.

The Hedge Witch wore a pair of black flared pantaloons with large bright orange marigolds printed on them, alongside a ripped *Thin Lizzy* t-shirt, and many silver necklaces. She tucked a strand of her long, red curly hair behind her huge, round, white sunglasses and bent down to take my hand. She was smiling so that I could see her gold front tooth, and I held her hand, which felt a little strange and knobbly as she wore many silver rings. She had startled me when she appeared.

“Hello, lovely,” she said as I squinted to make her out.

I knew who she was, of course, but I was eager to see exactly what she looked like this time, as on each occasion that I had met her, she would look quite different.

I still have no idea how old the Hedge Witch was. Each time I saw her, she blended right in. I had come to expect her visits, but she had a habit of disappearing and staying away for so long that you felt she had gone forever. When she reappeared, she was like many things from her world,

an augur, and without her saying a word, you knew that things were about to pivot.

You would brace yourself, knowing there would be some kind of dramatic change, sometimes good, sometimes not. In fact, the last time I saw her, by the end of her visit, I realised that she was there to announce the end of my childhood, and just like that, once she had gone, my first period arrived and with it a wave of sadness because she had told me that I was now too old for the likes of her and her world.

On this occasion, when I met her, I was no more than six and had been wandering quite happily along the one road that ran through my village. This was quite safe back then, during the day, as the only traffic would be a herd of cows with the cowmen, the odd tractor, and the occasional cars driven by a district nurse or a housewife. I had wandered down to the Blacksmith's forge, a combination of a Nissan hut and a lean-to; the front, with its large wooden doors, was pulled open, making the entire forge visible.

This was a great source of childhood entertainment, what with all the sparks flying, the glowing forge, where red-hot irons would sit before being subjected to percussive strikes on the anvil. I never tired when there

were so many horses to be shod. I would sit for hours on the other side of the road in the sun, watching the Blacksmith work. On very rare occasions, when he seemed to be doing something out of the ordinary, I would venture across to the forge entrance and linger until he came to speak to me. I would ask him what he was making and how he was doing it, and he would tell me. He was short with me, though. I was lucky if he spoke more than one or two sentences.

This particular encounter with the Hedge Witch was on one of my less adventurous occasions, when I was watching from afar, and I had noticed her as she cast a shadow across the pavement where I sat. It became clear that the Blacksmith thought she was very beautiful because, as we crossed the road together, he came straight out of his forge to see her, taking her hand, kissing it delicately while looking into her eyes. I watched his gaze, so full of delight at seeing her and felt inclined to agree. *Yes, she was very beautiful.*

“So, Silas Jones, I be here for a bit of an asking,” she said, taking her sunglasses off and looking at him intently.

I noticed on this occasion that her eyes were greener than I had ever seen them.

The Blacksmith smiled and stood back, crossing his arms.

“Oh,” said the Blacksmith, “Ask away.”

“Well,’ said the Hedge Witch, “This poppet here has not had her first reckoning yet, and what with the old world so very nearly gone, I think that we’d better get a move on.”

“Righty-O,” he said, “We have so much to lose if the old ways fade.”

“Too right, Silas, too right.” The Hedge Witch paused and looked down at me and then back at him. “I am wondering whether you can tell us who’s best to visit to get this fixed, so that she’s not denied her dues.”

“Well, you already know what I am going to say!” The Blacksmith laughed.

“Yes, but I always value a steer from you. It’s been many a year since we’ve had to gather everyone in like this and get the younglings started so early. How best to go about it, Silas?”

“It’s as I always say, Esme, start with the Fates.”

“Ah, so the house at the end of the road?” said the Hedge Witch.

The Blacksmith nodded and said no more. He just pointed to a horseshoe above his door, smiled mysteriously and winked.

The Hedge Witch, who had been standing outside of the forge, looked up and gasped, stumbling back a little, then took my hand and pulled me along the road, not looking back or saying goodbye.

I turned, though and saw the Blacksmith, standing with his arms crossed, watching us go.

The Hedge Witch pulled me all the way up the road to the house at the end of my world. It was a big, old and white with drawn curtains. The Hedge Witch rang a large, jangly bell on the porch but kept looking up at another horseshoe above the interior door. She pushed me into the porch and gestured for me to go forward as she stepped backwards along the path.

“Go now. It’s time for your reckoning. Inside the house, you will meet three ancient goddesses who control the thread of life. When you grow up, you will know them as the Fates.”

I had no idea what this meant and frowned back at the Hedge Witch.

A very old lady opened the door; she was rotund and wore a sundress and an apron.

“Oh, it’s you!” She shouted at the Hedge Witch, before waving a tea towel at her. “Be off with you before you curdle our milk! No need to explain why this little dot is here. I can see what’s to be done! It’s time for her reckoning with the Fates. What does life hold in store for you, little lady, I wonder?” The old woman started mumbling to herself as I watched the Hedge Witch retreat behind the front garden wall and disappear.

“Why isn’t she coming with me?” I asked in a quiet, trembling voice.

“Oh, don’t worry about her,” said the old lady, “She’s just a flibbertigibbet. We don’t let the likes of her across our threshold.” She pointed above the door. “What do you think the horseshoe is for?”

“To stop her?” I asked.

“Of course. Now, you should feel quite safe here, and you won’t see her for a while because she’s off to Glastonbury. I am Clover. I spin the thread of life.” Clover bent down and picked up a long stick with a big bundle of wool tied around the top of it.

Its shape reminded me of an umbrella.

I know now that Clover was actually the goddess ‘Clotho’ (The Spinner). She was holding a distaff and spinning raw wool, symbolising the birth of life.

“Let me introduce you to my sisters.” She said.

I followed Clover into the house. There was a large entrance hall with high ceilings and doors leading off it, with a grand staircase at the back. Sitting in front of the stairs were two other old ladies in front of a spinning wheel. They wore long black dresses and white aprons, and their silver hair was piled up atop their heads. They continued to spin as we walked towards them, and Clover fetched a small milking stool, placing me beside them. She disappeared into another room, and the two other ladies introduced themselves.

“I am Layla, I measure the thread of life, and this is my sister Anthea.”

I had no idea back then, but this was the goddess Lachesis (The Apportioner), who measures the thread of life, determining its exact length and the span of a mortal's years.

Layla busied herself at the spinning wheel, while Anthea leaned towards me, opening and closing her scissors. She smiled and whispered.

“Hello, my dear. I am afraid that I cut the thread of life. It is my job to decide how long you are here for.”

What would I have done if I had known that this was the goddess Atropos (The Inflexible), who introduces the

terrifying moment of mortality, carrying the shears to cut the thread and end life?

“Oh, I won’t stay long,” I said to Anthea. “Mummy wants me back home soon.”

Anthea looked at Layla and their faces cracked into smiles.

As they both chuckled and set about spinning again, Clover came back and handed me a glass of orange squash and a malted milk biscuit.

“Now that you have met all three of the Fates, we want you to sit right here quietly while we get the measure of you,” said Clover. “It won’t take long, and then I will walk you home.”

I sat quite still and was pleased because the ladies started to sing.

*“Your past is done now, parcelled up, a story to recall
You sit here, present as an Owl, in innocence of it all
Now you will be wild and free, green as the coppiced
hazel*

*But hardship will repeat itself, so goes life’s
unchanging fable.”*

The ladies continued to hum their tune while Anthea stood and said:

*“We’ve measured out your living lot and weighed up
all your chances.*

The fates have spoken.

Let it be; your life’s length is allotted.”

As they sang, I climbed down from the milking stool and curled up on a sheepskin rug on the floor. I must have fallen asleep, and I never did get to say goodbye. Clover carried me home to my mum before I woke, curled up on our sofa.



@snailfodderpress

Dead Man's Bells

Eddie Matthews



I have lined my bells with a damp pall.
I am the tall, nodding hunger of the ditch,
waiting for a wandering finger
to check the depth of my throat.

Step into the shade of my freckles:
a map of ink-stains for the lost,
heavy with a sweet, sullen weight.
Slide your thumb against my cheek –
a pleasant invitation,
a velvet-petal room.

Don't look for the exit.
Stay in the magenta hush.
Notice how the wind has stopped
though my bells are still
ringing,
 ringing,
 ringing –

Isn't it quiet,
this thick, smothered slowing?

How the air tastes of metal
and the ground begins to hum?

Pull the petal tight around your wrist.
I have so many rooms to show you.

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Special Offer on Spinal Liberation, This Month Only!

Poppy Bullock



“You don’t want to look at this part,” the woman said, using her forearm to wipe hair from her cheek, both hands holding a heavy gun-like instrument. She looked at me once more, nodded, then turned on the appliance. She sprayed directly across the pathway into the open door that held the next item to be pressure-washed. The gun was loud. If I were to make the noise out loud, I would say, “murrrr.”

I remained in the dark corridor, where the walls were sticky, something disagreeable having evaporated; it was thicker than blood but thinner than mucous. A thick globule of the same substance dripped on me from the low ceiling.

I closed my eyes, knowing what was happening. Knowing it was unpleasant but necessary, like a surgical procedure. At least, that’s what I’d read about it.

I had been advised against witnessing it, I knew it would do me no good, but its presence, tugged at my eyes

to peel towards it, to see what was behind the wall that separated us. I resisted for as long as possible, sincerely not wanting to enter the room, knowing what was in there and musing how strange it was that I couldn't feel anything connected to it.

The woman's concentration was compelling as she swung the gun from side to side, the bulge between her eyebrows growing. Did it mean something wasn't going according to plan, or was this just a particularly tough bit? I couldn't take it any longer, I took a step forward and peered around the open door and the woman stopped pressure-washing in reluctant, permission.

The sudden silence surprised me. Or perhaps it was the smell of raw burgers and metal. Or just the sight of it.

There was a concrete slab a meter inside the door, like at a Turkish bath. But this one had no need for decorative tiles, it was grey, wet and cold. On it lay my skeleton, neatly, obediently, like there was nothing else for it. I knew, of course, that it would be there, but seeing it in front of me still made me jolt and hold my breath. It had the microtwist in my hip, making my left foot stick out at a sharper angle than my right. The uneven jaw. It was me alright.

I stepped inside the room to avoid the water, watching as the woman directed the jets at specific areas on the bones, ridding the joints of the stubborn bits of tissue that clung to it. This was the part that the article had called the *Highest Emancipation* stage. I watched one section of flesh dance on the bone, wafting back and forth like a sea anemone. Bright pink and playful, swaying like it was in a jacuzzi. And then in one swift burst, it was gone and the bone shone alone. My eyes darted as the piece of tissue was blasted to the floor, joining other clumps of muscle and skin, now indecipherable lumps of pink and brown matter.

My skeleton was almost bare now and it looked cold.

Once the procedure was complete, she turned off the murr and told me I could make my way to the cafeteria, if I wanted. Or straight to the beds, which were in the relaxation room behind it. It's over, I thought. The procedure is over, and now I can be free, just as I've always wanted. I wanted to smile but wasn't ready to try. I couldn't manage a thank you so silently bowed my head, distracted by the movements of my body without a spine. My actions were harder to manage. I felt my insides bulge and wobble without the usual structure, my strides and

arm swings were soupy. I shuffled my way down to the cafeteria to the stack of trays waiting at the entrance.

From this moment, I knew I had a maximum of twenty-four hours to live. In all likelihood, I had a lot less. I felt like I had less.

I looked around the room and was surprised by how busy it was. The pictures had made it look like a spa, but with the warm, meaty smells, the crowds, the bright lights...it didn't feel like a spa now I was here. A man stood by the trays, trying to control his arms long enough to carry the tray to the rails before him. One side of the tray kept slipping out of his hand with a clatter. Perhaps he'd waited too long. I picked up a tray and put it on the railings for him before getting my own. His eyes swam in his head trying to find me, and when he opened his mouth to thank me, his toothless hole flopped out a tongue and moaned at me.

I was too scared to respond. I didn't want to know what my own mouth might do, even though I was only minutes in.

I slid my tray along the railings to join the queue, purposefully not looking at the other people in the room, as had been advised in the brochure. The man in front of me was pointing at the beef soup, making the same noise

he had made at me. I noticed a dimpling in his bald head, at the top and on one side.

My eyes wandered to the right without me wanting them to, and I had to swing them back to the left, then correct them into the middle to see the board. I tried to concentrate on the food they had on offer; I didn't want to think about what my body was doing. The board said this:

BEEF SOUP

CHICKEN SOUP

VEGETABLE SOUP

VANILLA SOUP

RASPBERRY SOUP

OYSTER TOWER SOUP

By the time I was handed my vegetable soup and I'd taken it to the till, the man in front of me had gained a sunken spot where the dimples once were. The woman in front of him had the same, but her neck was giving to the weight of her head, meaning she must've seen everything on a tilt.

I didn't mean to, but as my eyes grazed the room looking for a seat, I took in the state of other people. One woman's head was almost entirely concaved, the eyes

were turning inwards on themselves, like a doll whose head had been squeezed.

The man sitting next to her was leaning to one side like a failing sandcastle, his arm limp, his lungs heaving to breath. There was a clatter of metal and broken porcelain as a man who had been carrying a tray of raspberry soup had his legs go before his torso. A woman looked up at the noise, her face starting to concave, too. I could see she had worn full make-up this morning, and the mascara was smearing where the folds of her face kissed. The only thing still in place on her face were her bright pink lips, sticking out like inflated tubes.

My eyes started swimming again and I felt a pressure inside my head, like someone was pressing inside, or like a cat sat on top of it. I tried to shake my head, to get rid of it, and instantly regretted it. I felt a sliding somewhere behind my nose, a meaty drip from my sinuses that landed at the base of my throat. I instinctively swallowed and tasted a mix of phlegm and uncooked pork. I tried to look at my soup, to concentrate on my soup. They said to try to act as normally as possible until it was time to lie down. You'd know when it was time, they said, don't leave it too long.

I decided I would have my soup and move to the lying down area just so I didn't have to see these people, see my future self of a few hours' time in their bodies.

I wanted to control my eyes but instead they landed on a crumpled mass which lay just three seats away. At first, I thought it was discarded clothes, until I realised the mass of hair. It was someone perhaps ten hours ahead of me. Someone who should have been in the lying down area but had left it too late. Their jeans were mixed with ear lobe, folds of flesh like a fallen bathrobe, some burst skin with ragged, red edges, letting out something that looked like a pink pearl balloon. Then I spotted in amongst the heap, an eye, which was tucked underneath a cable of veins. Only half of it was visible, but when I saw it blink, I swung my eyes away.

The head of the man opposite me was now collapsing like a pumpkin left outside three months after Halloween. Soft, pulpy.

The magazine hadn't said anything about what would happen in the cafeteria. I wasn't sure I felt as light and free as I was expecting. I wondered what would happen if I asked the lady with the *murrr* gun to reinsert my skeleton. But I'd signed the papers.

I'd done as they'd asked and passed on the discount code to my family before I came, so that I could get one of the luxury beds, subject to availability.

A deep sadness came over me, one of regret and missed opportunity. If only, I thought. I took a mouthful of vegetable soup and felt it dribble down my neck. I wouldn't be feeling like this if I'd stumped for the VIP package.

List of Illustrations:

Cover, 'Orithyia' and 'Callate,' by Emma Kurr; 'The Hedge Witch,' 'Dead Man's Bells,' and 'Spinal Liberation' by Molly Beckham.

The *UNCANNY* Team



Editors

Santi Lopez-Cotarelo

Amelie Chadwick

Ana Canas Molteni

Zara Siddiqui

Heather Cruft

Max McIntosh

Artists

Molly Beckham

(@snailfodderzine)

Emma Kurr

(@emmytanno)



FOLLOW US: @warwickuncanny

EMAIL US: warwickuncanny@gmail.com



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