

**CHILLS
&
THRILLS**

**HARVEST
INTERNATIONAL**

OCTOBER 2024

CHILLS & THRILLS

Presented by

Harvest
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FOREWORD

A huge thank you to all the writers for taking the time to submit their hard work. Even if not selected, we thank for your time and dedication!

From the Harvest International Team

*Cecilia Goto
Nuoyan Li
Madisson Amparo
Leo Mendez
Jocelyn Esquivas
Heriban Rangel
Brianna Hernandez
Melissa Ibarra
Nickolis Bergevin
Mridula Ram
Mr. Luna*





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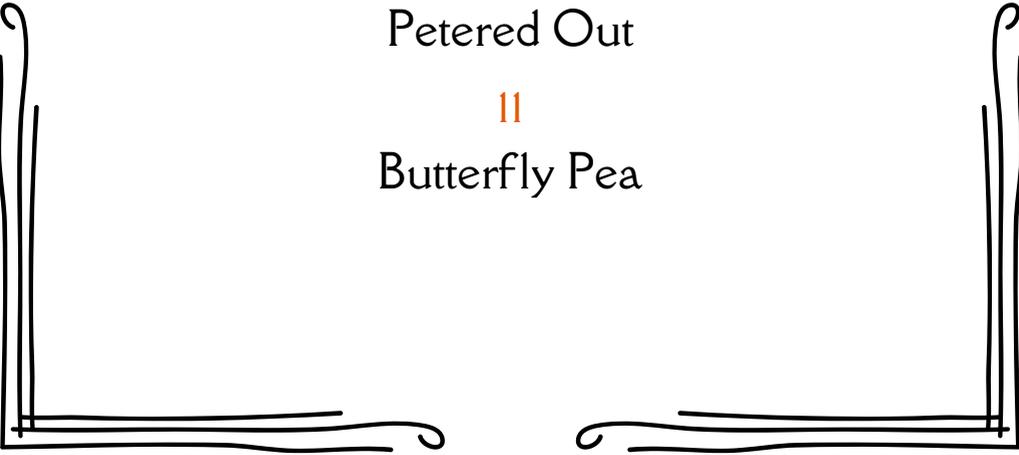
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ALL MINE

BY NOLAN EDWARDS

I've worked in the mines since I was a child. The rats became familiar, maybe even comforting, because it meant something could survive down here. No matter how deep I went, the rats always seemed to show up when I thought I was alone. I had always wondered how they survived.

It was the middle of September and I was assigned a new person to train. He had never worked in the mines before, but his stature made him a great candidate for me. The new guy was brawny enough to withstand the tough work of the mines and had enough meat on his bones to survive the cold nights. He was a perfect choice.

We had met with my boss yesterday to go over what was going to be expected of him as a new worker. He must shadow his supervisor for his first day and go over safety protocol in a stable mine

before stepping foot in any of the old mines around town. There was no need to beat around the bush, I knew he was ready for more. I gave him the address of one of the most remote and dilapidated sites.

"Are ya ready?" I ask as we stand at the threshold of the entrance. The kid turns to me with false confidence and then nods before he looks forward. The fear returns to his face when he thinks I'm not looking. We continue down the long damp railways looking for any items we were set to retrieve from this site. I make casual conversation by bringing up some stories about my days in the mine. I tell him about the time my old partner got his finger cut off and about the worker who was electrocuted and swore he saw the light at the end of the tunnel. Even though I am telling my stories, I never took my eyes off of him. He is going to be perfect.

SQUEEAAKKK! A rat drops from a hole in the ceiling and bites his ear. My skin jolts with a quickness. Quickly, I rip the rat off of him and hurl it behind us.

“Let’s go,” I take his arm and direct him towards a break in the rail-system, “...there should be a room over here.” My hand guides him to a stone room with a chair set near its entrance. With his hand on his bleeding ear, he sits down nervously.

SQUEEAAKK!

We hear loud, familiar noises echoing through the room. The new guy shifts around nervously while trying to find the source of the noise.

“I think there’s something in that wall,” he points his shaking finger. I walk over and look into the crevice, smiling with delight.

“You should see this.” I gesture him out of his seat.

He was hesitant to look, but eventually he trusted me enough to come over. I stood aside and showed him what was making the noise. He stood in awe and disgust.

“They’re eating each other.” He couldn’t look away. Lucky for me, he didn’t notice the grin

on my face. Or the rock in my hand.

I licked my lips; he was going to be perfect.



HARVEST MOON

BY ZOE HINDERLITER



The harvest is an important time for us out in the farmlands. It is our livelihood. We are the very soul of the nearby city. We strive every year to take care of our crops for those who are too busy with their fancy jobs to even try to grow their own crop. Our hands are covered in blisters and calluses, sore from plowing and gathering, while theirs are smooth and soft, some colored with bright nail paint that they simply cannot ruin. They don't know a hard day's work even if it popped up in the latest fashion magazine, with pictures of stylish clothing made from our sheep's wool. They're out there enjoying the bright lights from electricity; meanwhile, we count on the light of a candle to find our way. The city takes us for granted, calling country folk dirty and poor, superstitious too.

These city folk don't know the truth about the harvest moon. They say it's just a phenomenon signaling the coming of the autumn equinox, or just some sort of chance to score publicity points on their social medias. However, to us, it is a time of warning. For us, the coming of the harvest moon is a matter of life and death, a thin line between us and... "It." It comes for blood in the middle of the night as we work, whisking its victims away, never to be seen again. So we need a distraction.

That's where the city folk come in. Every now and then, a traveler will find themselves stranded on our farmlands as a

result of their car breaking down. We invite them to stay with us, providing food, comfort, and warmth. Some are grateful, which makes it harder to do what needs to be done. Some would rather not deal with us, opting to try and call a ride to get them out of this, in their words, 'filthy, disgusting pigsty.' There's never any signal. Not out here.

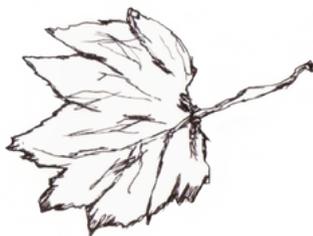
Night comes hours later. The moon is rising. We must be quick. Our guest from the city is brought to the middle of the crops. Sometimes while they are still sleeping, other times when they are wide awake, kicking and screaming. Tied to a pole in the middle of the field, we dress them up like one of us; they think that's the worst of it. Dirt and mud is then thrown on to them, making it look like they've been working in the field for hours on end. Finally, a mask made out of an old sack with only one hole in it for the eye is forced on top their head —to the crows, it was just another scarecrow; to us, our key to safety. We then leave the guest there as we head back to work, the harvest moon finally reaching the sky.

Its orange glow shines upon the field, the wind begins to howl. It has arrived.

Now, no one knows what It is supposed to be as there have been no survivors to tell the tale. But one thing is sure: It's vicious. As we work away from the field, we can hear the screams of the city folk, begging for help. But no help ever comes. It's like that for a while, the wind howling louder and louder drowning out the sounds of terror coming from the cornfield. Then finally, silence. The screams have stopped, the wind dies down, and the harvest moon stops shining so bright. Some of us brave farmers go and check in the cornfield to see what was left. All they see is an empty pole, crows circling from above, and blood dripping. Some blood even ends up on the corn, which is believed to be what makes the crops tastier.

Morning comes, and the crops are plentiful. Our corn is the brightest yellow and our pumpkins are as big as they can come. It may have taken the blood of another human, but it

was worth it to have a successful harvest. This repeated ritual is what helps us through the many years of harvest. Are we monsters for sacrificing another human to keep us safe and our crops plentiful? Maybe. Are we to blame for It wanting blood from any man, woman, child, or animal? No, but it's how it is and how it's been for years. It's hard to say when it first started, perhaps the land we live on has always been so demanding, but we don't care to question it. We only aim to keep it going, for who knows what happens if we stop under the watch of the harvest moon.



GIRL-MONSTER

BY KATE JENSEN

Gray hammered the last nail until the flat head was flush. He tugged – solid – and draped a wool blanket over the window to keep the fat snowflakes from sneaking through the cracks. The moaning wind tore through the forest.

He could have sworn – no, he did swear – he glimpsed those hulking, silent shadows slipping between the black trees.

Nothing in, nothing out; the window: boarded; the door: barricaded: the girl—she cowered, shivering, in the corner, wide hazel eyes flickering yellow in the firelight.

“C’mere,” he beckoned, “Not gunna hurt ya. But you’ll catch a chill.” Snow-soaked, sniffing, she crept closer. Gray draped a blanket around her shoulders, keeping his arm there.

“Hungry.”

Gray jerked – a snowdrift? –

thud thud-ed on the cabin roof. The girl squirmed. “Hungry.”

“Can’t – they smell yer’ uh, bleedin’ ‘nough already.”

The girl sniffed. Whatever weight was on the ceiling slid off, dragging against the walls. The wind whipped the blankets away from the windows, and Gray saw for certain the raised hackles of one of those beasts pass by the window – a jagged, black knife of bristly hair.

The girl tried to wriggle out of his grip, but Gray held firm. “Hey, hey, you quit— SHIT!”

Teeth sank into his hand. Sharp teeth.

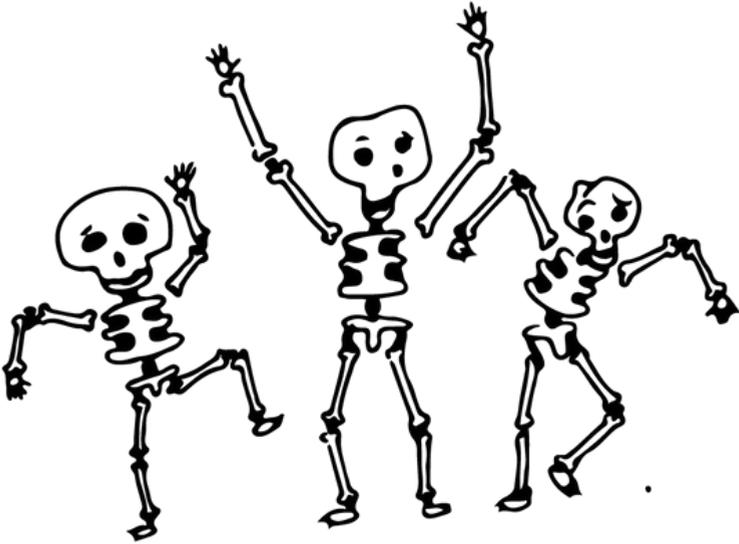
Gray flung himself back, clutching his mangled hand. The girl stood.

Yellow fiery eyes.

Took a step forward.

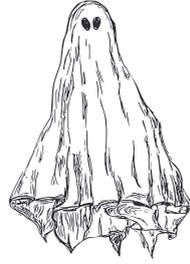
Blood on her chin, her dress, between her legs. “Hungry.”

Her sisters howled on the wind as she feasted.



PETERED OUT

BY KEVIN SANTOS



I remember him.

They don't remember him, but I do.

I remember when he helped me with my math homework.

Mrs. Dovetko wondered why I didn't work with others in the class.

I remember playing basketball with Peter.

Ricardo never gave him a high five.

I remember walking home with Peter talking about his stats exam and his dog Jack. I remember graduating with Peter and how he wanted to become an Aerospace Engineer.

But, my parents don't remember him coming to the party.

I remember Peter's wedding, at the Rosewood Bermuda.

I remember traveling with Peter, to The Hotel California.

I remember Peter's favorite food spot, The Vindaloo Vanish.

I remember afterschool talks with Peter about life. Other students wandered the English department too.

I remember it all.

I do.

But-

they always asked why I talked about the boy who was kidnapped in 1995.

BUTTERFLY PEA

BY JUNIPER SETH

Flecks of paint scatter to the ground as I rap my knuckles against the maple door. Any strangers passing by just assume the old cottage is abandoned. Maybe Sprite likes it that way. Then again, if she did, she probably wouldn't be griping about how she has to sell all the canned peaches from her garden just to make ends meet. I raise my fist again, but the door swings open before I get a chance to start knocking harder.

"Finally," I mutter as I sidestep into the dim room.

She's superstitious. Ritualistically so. She won't let me in until the sunset, when the sun breaks through the horizon. If she's quick, we'll be done by dusk. I don't want to walk home in the dark.

The tea is already steeping. I lower myself onto the plush stool as she goes through the motions: drain, swirl, drain. Four turns, counter-clockwise.

She whispers something, but I don't listen. It's the same every week. I glance over the flickering candle flames. They blur as my eyes lose focus and I start to pick at the scab on my elbow.

"Look," she commands.

I startle, pulling on the scab to reveal a patch of red and raw skin.

I lean over the cup, and I can see: I'm laughing. My cheeks are warm and flushed. Fingers graze my jaw, pausing as a thumb brushes my lips. Then, I'm flipping through the pages of a book. No, a tome more like it. Reading. Scribbling notes. I'm a student, I surmise. And I have a lover.

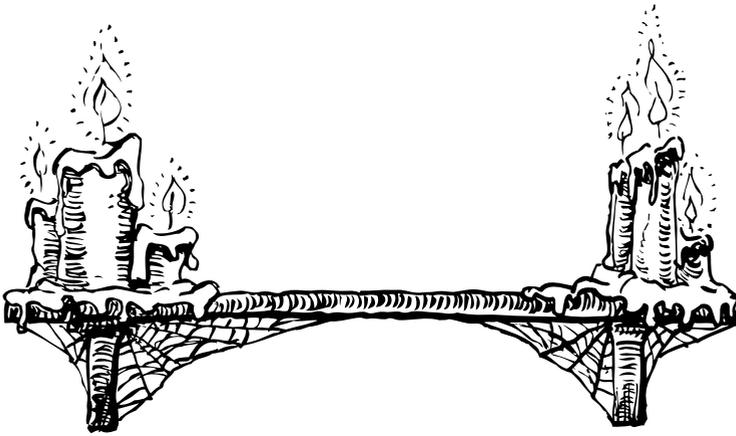
"Stop," Sprite's voice erupts through the reverie. My head snaps up to see her glowering at me. "That's enough."

There's a new heat rising in me. I stand, slamming into the table and toppling the porcelain cup.

“Don’t come back next week,”
she warns.

But I’m already striding
toward the door and her voice
trails behind me.

At home, I sink to the floor
and bury my face into my
hands. Tears rush through my
fingers as I let out something
between a scream and a sob. A
grieving cry for someone who
will never be.







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