

Mongol – Corpses of the Divine

By Nicu Stefan Cristian

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Road to Mannorstare: 'It all started on 22 of March 1842. It wasn't that long ago.
I hope you understand why I was so afraid and confused about what I saw, to even consider coming back to report it.
You must know by now what I'm talking about, that cursed town that no one dares to even bat an eye at.
The ancient town we'd never approach.
I can't tell you anything about its inhabitants. The ones that I met aren't in the best condition. Pardon, my intrusion, I hate smoking.
As I was saying, I was a spawn, perhaps closer to maturity since I comprehended the seriousness of my actions. I made the mistake of running away from my family in search of someone by the name of Bartholomew. Rumors spread long before I came there, that the great musician was searching for an apprentice. Who would pass the possibility of becoming his pupil?
To work directly under his tutelage was my dream ever since I heard his ceremonious symphonies. Even as a spawn without experience, I knew that I couldn't give up.
After all, some risks are worth taking, at least, that's what I had in mind when I ran off to that town in the first place.
The sky was crying that day and I had no raincoat on me.
Just like a wet dog I ran to that town, trying to figure out where he was.
The streets were empty and most houses appeared to be locked down to the toughest nail. I didn't have enough time to search the entire area since a bigger storm was brewing.
Luckily for me, I didn't have to.
A tavern was open and its lights kept flickering at me. I thought I could finally rest. Dead roses and scorned worms got in the way though I paid little attention to those signs. The nameplate above the tavern read: 'The Dried Loin Tavern.
' Its door knob was too cold to handle so I had to lower my sleeve to open it.
Despite not being strong enough to force my way in, I kept trying, thinking that Bartholomew could be waiting for me on the other side.
He would share the secrets of his trade and shape my future from that point on.
It was my one and only chance and a simple door would not stop me. The weather wasn't getting any better. Mind that, the lightning only managed to cover the howls partially.
I took a break from trying to unscrew the bolt as I began looking around. Nothing in sight except some rubble spread around.
Enough of this, I punched the door until my knuckles turned red, trying to get in as I made as much noise as I possibly could.
With assault unwavering, my fists began dissipated the water drops in their path.
Someone was definitely in there. They had to help me somehow.
As the door slightly opened a giant-like hand grabbed me by the shoulder throwing me inside.
I fell on the ground but at least I was in.
After picking myself up I saw a tall bearded man locking up the door.
He almost crushed his rugged cap before he turned around to scream at me. From the look on his face, it seemed that he wasn't expecting me.
I didn't know what to do.
He stood there and kept yelling at me, ready to strike me down where I stood.
I lay as frozen as a statue, as silent as a lamb in front of a bull, speechless for what was about to come.
While paying no attention to what he said, out of fear for my life I closed my eyes in embarrassment, hoping he didn't notice.
He grabbed me again with his dirty hand, this time I he turned me around.
I opened my eyes only to find myself standing in front of the people from around the tavern who were minding their business drinking and gambling away their change.
Our eyes didn't meet.
I was far too embarrassed to look at them or even at the place.
I didn't recognize his uniform at the time, but the man who held me was probably a sailor.
He wore a blue uniform with lots of buttons, a dark cap to cover his bald spot and a scowl that intimidated me easily.
He stopped yapping and stared at me after, waiting for something in return.
His patience was thin I noticed it as he adjusted his cap towards his right side.
I opened my mouth barely managing to ask what was going on.

It was hard since I was soaked and I didn't want to get thrown away out there.
After being unhanded I heard him for the first time.
His voice was as rough as he looked when he told me: 'Laddie, you better have a good reason to come in here and get us this much attention.
I could throw you back from where you came from, don't you know what day it is?
You'll regret the decision you made this day, I promise you that.
' Those were the only words I managed to understand after he calmed down. But I didn't know what he meant by it.
I didn't know what to say to him, other than the truth.
'I came searching for the Grand Instructor Bartholomew, sir.
' The sailor took a deep breath and told me that there was no one by that name in here and I should go back home.
The rain would go on for hours but I did not doubt he'd throw me out without a second thought.
'What's your name spawn?
' His request was ignored since I wasn't sure I could trust him with my name.
Especially after what he said, he wasn't a stable man. Nor did he appreciate the gesture.
'You stupid prick!
' He said it out loud before raising his hand at me.
He was fast enough in the draw that I couldn't get out of the way if he did it.
But another hand came appeared out of nowhere just in time to stop him. I didn't see her until he was pushed out of the way.
'That's enough of you Rod.
You had way too many drinks now, you should know better than to hit a spawn' Her voice was only as pleasant as her protection.
I had to wait for their entire argument to finish before I could thank her for taking my side.
'Don't get emotional now Hannah, you know what happened the last time someone came in unannounced.
If the spawn stays, who knows what terrible thing might happen.
' She placed herself between us, even though we haven't even officially met yet.
'We can't send the spawn outside. Did you see the condition he's in? The poor boy is shaken all over.
Plus, it's an even greater risk to open the door again.
She spoke softly but bitterly towards Rod, who didn't care what anyone thought about it.
'If anything happens, it will all be on you Hannah.
' That's the last thing he said before storming out to one of the barrels near the tables in the tavern, not to mention that he gave me the stink eye.
She turned around and introduced herself to me, right before asking me if I was hurt.
I was doing fine thanks to her.
It's sad to think what could've happened if she wasn't there shield me from Rod.
She smiled before patting me gently on the back, humming a sweet melody I did not forget.
That music helped me forget the conundrum I was in. Hannah continued checking me for any harm she missed.
While doing it, I noticed her long black hair, her tender skin and the blue surroundings.
She asked me to follow her as quickly as possible.
We were headed towards a set of stairs, which lead to another floor inside the tavern.
I didn't pay enough attention to the other people down there as I was too afraid of getting into another fight.
But I managed to glimpse at an old banshee who was standing at a table, drinking from a crow's nest.
No one paid any attention to us, except Rod but I can't be sure since we were too far away from him at this point.
After climbing a long set of stairs, we stopped in the middle of a corridor filled with enough rooms to accommodate a dozen people at least.
It was also quiet.
At this point no noise came from inside the tavern.
The howls started again, but it sounded like no wolf I ever heard of. Hannah was able to notice it before I did.
The next thing caught me off guard.
She wrapped her hands around me and apologized for something.
'Do you see that square up on the ceiling, the one that looks like a trunk?
I know it's hard to see, but you're going to have to hide inside the attic for the rest of the night.
I promise you everything's going to be all right.
' Everything happened way too fast, I didn't know what to do.
Something was bashing the door violently downstairs and I didn't know who or what it was.

Even after trying to face it, I was stopped. 'Time's running out.
Why is it so hard for you to understand?
' I did not say a word but nodding my head wasn't a problem.
After reaching up the ceiling a small ladder fell down from the attic.
I received a kiss on the forehead before I got pushed in, hearing the sound of the hatch clicking in.
Ever had a feeling that someone's about die?
Not only someone, but just about everyone in that tavern that night. I never got the chance to thank her, before
it went on again.
A greater growl came from outside, far more ferocious than it had ever been.
And I was stuck here, in an old attic with a barricaded window standing at its end.
The gaps between the wooden planks were big enough for light to come in.
I took care not to make any noise while stepping on that slimy rotten floor.
Breaking her request wasn't my intention.
By now the noise coming from downstairs was the loudest it got up to this point.
I took the opportunity to look out for myself. It was the figure of an animal.
No, it was unlike any animal I've ever seen.
As this beastly thing kept pounding on the door with its mere brute force.
For a moment, I thought I was noticed as it backed away a few feet away from where it stood.
Without thinking, I ran and hid in the closest corner I could get in.
A final growl came but not from outside.
The smashing of the door echoed throughout the tavern.
I tried my best to cover my ears, hearing their voices as they shouted in pain.
That beast made it inside and started butchering them without a care. And it would eventually come after me, I
feared.
I prayed for her safety, yet it was in vain.
Rod hadn't deserved it either and soon enough my safety came in harm's way too.
His voice came near the hatch.
The sounds of the struggle between him and that fiend could still be heard.
Though I can't imagine what went through his head during their fight. And all of the sudden the voices stopped.
I felt tormented for the entirety of that night.
Not only were objects were being smashed from down under but the cloth from what seemed to be the beds got
torn apart.
Why did any of that have to happen? Did it leave me alone?
Does it know where I am?
Could I be the only one left alive? They must have escaped somehow.
I wanted to leave but she told me not to, I couldn't disappoint her.
The sad truth was too much to take at the time, my thoughts were scrambled inside my head and at a point I
even denied any of that even happened.
Everything happened so fast yet so slow, it's hard for me to figure out if it was real or not.
The rest of that night is still blurry.
I didn't eat in days since I decided to go after Bartholomew and that finally took its toll.
Combined with the cold, I started feeling nauseous, so, so tired, the attic I was in must have felt the same, as it
started shaking with me.
There's another thing I forgot to mention.
Before I managed to fall to sleep, I had one last chance to look at the hatch that wasn't far from where I was.
Something kept pushing through but I can't remember what happened after it.
That was the longest night of my entire life. I'm still able to remember it up to this day.
The dreams I had, dead flies and chopped crowns still hid away what were my last moments of peace.
The next day I remember waking up near a bird-man with a crow face, in a small hut.
He was nice enough to give me something to eat as he helped me recover. I never asked him about his
appearance as it gave me the creeps.
After that I thanked the man and left the town, avoiding the tavern and everyone else who came in my path.
I believe that was the same time I've got here.
I wasn't able to tell anyone about what happened without being called insane and not believe a word I said and
who could blame them?
So that's how it happened and that's why I never got to tell anyone about it.
In ten damn years, no one was able to find their corpses and others even pretend like they don't even know
about the town itself.

Not even one day goes by without me thinking about going back there.

Look, Jon, a lot happened since then, I'm not the same person I used to be back then, but I can't just stand any longer and do nothing about it, people must know.

'Before being able to go back to my job, I had to appeal to Jon, a lousy friend who managed to become a decent detective.

He didn't write much on his little note, not that I expected much, even from a friend, but at least, he was able to hear me out, I couldn't ask for more from anyone else.

He slammed his hand on the table and told me as we were eye to eye: 'Look, I don't know what you want me to say.

It's hard to believe that a creature or an animal of some sort could come and get rid off so many people in less than a night, not to mention to escape without a trace.

You don't have to lie to me, we're friends, and after all, so, as a friend, I'm going to have to ask you to forget about it, for your sake and for everyone else around you.

' I couldn't believe I was being told to forget about those people who died before me and let their deaths mean nothing, after all, that happened.

And forget about the encephalic-abrogate who sacrificed herself to save me?

'I should have known better.

I'm sorry if I wasted your precious time Jon, you clearly have other things better to do.

Our conversation is now over. I'll take my leave now if I may.

After telling him that, I tried making my way out but he stopped me from going any further: 'Wait, one moment before you leave.

I know that it doesn't seem fair towards you and something's telling me that you're not going to give up so easily.

I might have known something about your situation with that place but I couldn't speak about it back then.

' Jon was searching for something behind his back, I didn't know what he wanted to give me, nor did I know why but he pulled out a small handbook, slightly covered up in black leather.

'What's with this book Jon and why are you handing it to me so sudden?' He offered me the book and told me that: 'It was my mother's journal. I don't know much about her.

I've never had the chance to meet her since she was born and raised there.

Here's her journal, I hope it helps you more than it did me.

And by the way, if you meet my wife, don't tell her what I said to you.

' His mother's journal, it was sudden yet I didn't want to complain about it.

It seemed like it paid off becoming friends after all. My hand flied right through, opening it straight away. 'It's full of nonsense, I know.

I've never able to break the code and understand what she was trying to tell me as I failed in my every attempt.

Perhaps you might be able to get through to her somehow. That, if what you've been saying to me so far is true.

' I closed the journal and put it in my backpack. 'Thank you, Jon, I knew you'd understand.

' Jon looked at me and smiled, he was happy to help.

I was happy that I was getting closer to my goal though his eyes scream of sorrow and mistrust.

He's been through enough, I should leave him be.

I wasn't going to ask him more questions about his mother except: 'Have you even wondered what happened to her?

' A small break before I continued. 'Your mother I mean.

' Jon didn't give me any answer but I could see that the question made him feel uncomfortable.

I had no reason to attempt any further, my point had already been clear. 'I should get going now, say hello to your wife for me Jon.

' 'Don't worry, I will. Take care of yourself.

' After saying goodbye to Jon, I've made my way out of the interrogation room, immediately bumping into another one of the bulls.

Papers were flying everywhere, all falling on the ground.

It so happened that it was Jon's wife, Veronica, angry as usual. I told her that 'It was all an accident; I didn't mean to do it.

' Then I helped her pick all of them off the ground.

I felt like this was going to come back to bite me some day. 'Don't worry about it, just be safe, okay?

' That was unexpected, to say the least.

I don't know why I expected her to be angrier at me for messing up but for some reason she smiled and went on her way after handing her the papers.

As I made my way out of the section, something felt off. I felt like a wrongly imprisoned inmate getting

released.

Perhaps it was something she did that made me feel that way.

On my way to work, I took the journal out of my backpack and started going through random pages from it. The journal was nothing more than an average memoir with small exceptions; some of the passages from it were not only unrecognizable but smeared in something.

It was too late for me to go back and from the way he acted, it didn't seem like we wanted to talk about it any longer.

Shame, he did seem to know a greater deal about it than me.

I was glad to be able to enjoy the rest of the day, oh wait; I still had to go to work.

This small memento will have to wait, at least until I got back home after.

As I made my way through town, I made sure to pass next to the local flower store.

Call it a hunch but I thought that the shopkeeper's daughter had a crush on me.

So, making sure I was farther away, but not far enough for her to see me, I waved at the store from the opposite street.

Luckily for me, she was there to wave back at me.

Quite a sweet girl she was but what a shame that she was never able to speak.

Didn't weight her down, though.

The road I was on got me faster towards where I wanted to get.

It wasn't too far from where I stood; the newspaper office was almost in my grasp.

I wasn't too bad of a journalist, but far from the best, at least not yet.

One of these days, with enough proof, I could reveal everything, I was sure of it.

Everyone will know of my achievement and of my story.

As I made my way to the office and opened the door, a gust came from behind me and swept all the papers that lay on the ground even farther away.

It was so hot outside that it was out of place.

This time, it wasn't my fault; I wasn't even here to begin with. But alas, a trickster decided to make my life even harder.

Some of my co-workers were already trying to clean up and didn't appreciate me making their lives miserable.

Even the boss came shortly after to yell at me. 'Five minutes late and look at my workplace!'

This isn't an animal farm.

Now, help them clean everything up and get back to your job.

'I didn't dare talk back to him and just nodded my head, I've grown fearful of intimidating people and unfortunately he was one of them.

He wasn't always that way, at least not when his wife was around. 'Are you going to stare or come join us?'

A part of the problem is because of you after all' Francis, a fellow journalist who was picking through editions of yesterday's papers.

For a second, I thought I saw everything on the paper as unrecognizable gibberish.

As I picked it up to take a better look at it, its appearance came back to normal.

'Are you feeling okay?' He asked me.

I answered him quickly that: 'I was, I mean I am.

I should keep picking them up.

' He rolled his eyes as I continued doing it, but none of the other papers were different, the stress must be catching up with me.

There wasn't much time, I picked my share and decided to throw it in the pile near the machine.

The boss wanted me to come to him since he waved his hand at me.

It didn't help that I stood alone in the middle of the room either. When I got closer to his desk and asked him: 'Did you want to see me?'

' He was going through files and his small desk light almost reflected through the glasses in his hand.

As if it wasn't bad enough being with him alone, it got worse as the light kept coming into my eye.

He told me: 'Look, I don't want you late anymore, do you understand? We're a professional company and people depend on us.

Don't make me have this talk again with you, okay?'

' I didn't want to anger him with my excuses because I knew he wouldn't understand.

'I understood' I left his desk soon after.

I should have gone to the police in my spare time. That would have spared me of some trouble.

On my way back, I saw Carla and Matthew back at their desks writing. Francis, and that didn't surprise me, still had to pick up his share. 'Francis, do you need some help picking up those?'

' I was suddenly interrupted by him. 'No.

Shouldn't you be meeting someone now?

'Then it stung me that I did have to be somewhere else.

You were supposed to meet with Carla and help her with that article, remember?

'Wait!

'I almost yelled, loud enough for everyone to hear me. 'That was today?'

'I lowered my voice soon after and apologized to everyone. 'That was today Francis?'

'Yes, I thought you knew and just made a quick stop here. 'Could you please move out of the way?'

'I didn't notice it straight away until a second after but Ken made his way to the office.

He was the man responsible for repairing and maintaining the machine and what not.

I didn't want to judge him but, he did lose his wife and some of his friends.

'Yeah, sorry, I'm just a mess this day.

'Could you move out of the way so I could do my job then?'

'I already said I'm sorry, I'm not going to say it a second time, but I did get out of his way and let him to his business.

Since I was near him, I gave him a hand and even some tools while he worked on it.

In less than half an hour, he was done.

The way he managed to pull its metal tendrils and unclog its pipes always fascinated me.

I always felt like I could watch him work at it for hours.

I almost forgot about Carla, strange, I swear I saw her at her desk a moment ago, but she wasn't there.

There's no way that she just left when I wasn't paying attention, I would've heard the door being slammed.

I got out of the office after that and started running towards our usual meeting point.

I couldn't remember where exactly but I thought she said it was in the town's square.

Close enough, I almost hit another man on my way to it while walking on the street.

I eventually got there, just in time, as Carla was waiting for me, near the founder's statue.

Not the happiest look on her face.

The same look of annoyance she always had when things didn't go her way.

She appeared to be mad but at the same time, something betrayed the fact that she seemed thrilled, happy to see me.

'You're late as usual, by a lot of time.

I swear, if I wasn't in such a good mood, I might have requested a new partner.

'She wanted to start a war with me but I had no intention of carrying it, especially since she was right.

My only other choice was to calm her down before it was too late. 'Look, Carla, I had some personal issues to take care of.

I've taken a lot of bollocks from everyone, including you. Now, can we just go and talk about it later?'

'I knew she wasn't going to let me off the rail that easily but she wasn't heartless either.

'Fine, but next time be faster!

I got a feeling that both of our asses are on the line anyway. 'We started walking towards the street.

I thought about asking her about the office but the thought left my mind soon after.

Instead, I was curious about the current assignment.

'So Carla, I was detained the whole time by the dets and I've already lost some time in the office.

The point is that I forgot about what we were supposed to write about today.

'Of course, you did.

Look, you forgot about the new shop opening today. 'What's so special about it anyway?'

It's just another shop in a town full of them.

'But she looked so anxious about it like that I knew there was something more about it.

'Fine, what's the catch, Terry?' She didn't appreciate that.

'I told you not to call me that, and you will find out once we get there.

Call it a surprise if you want to and step on it, we don't have all day to spare.

'She was indeed something.

I picked up my old camera from my backpack and was ready to go for it.

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Carla was the one leading the way so I couldn't just rush without knowing where to go, so I decided to have some more small talk with her.

I felt I should say something about her having a braid, which was strange because she's never done anything about her hair before.

Something about it made her so different in more than one way. Funny how one simple thing can change one so much.

I do wonder what made her go for this particular style.

‘Are you going to keep staring at my head for the rest of the way?’

I mean I don't mind it but I hope you're not doing it for the wrong reasons.

‘A direct approach wasn't the best option but at this point, I had no choice.’

‘So, what have you done with your hair?’

‘I could see from her face that she was somewhat offended. ‘You do know how to act like a wet paddler, don't you?’

‘Wait, what did you call me Terry?’

‘With a smirk on her face, she turned quickly on a side. ‘I'm just messing with you. Don't worry about it.’

Since we're almost there, do you want to know about why we're going there or not?’

‘Tell me already, and don't be so bitter next time.’

‘As I was saying, there are some ongoing rumors that the owner of the store might be the son of a baron who fled away from his father because he was forced to marry someone who he didn't want to.’

‘This whole rumor sounded like a hoax to me so he could get people to purchase from his store, but nevertheless.’

It wouldn't surprise me if they were both hand in hand, getting paid to advertise the place.

Perhaps there was something else to it.

‘Carla, it seems like you've got the hots for him.’ ‘Maybe you're the one who has them, but not I. And I'd never be with someone like him; you can be sure on that.’

‘I tried convincing her that it might make a bad article, based on a rumor, even if.’

‘Your feelings are clouding your judgment. You're not thinking straight, are you?’

‘But our conversation leads to nowhere since the article was being made one way or another.’

‘Oh?’

Don't tell me you're jealous, are you?’

‘And then she glanced into my eyes knowing that it would make me mad.’

I won't go down that easily, at least not without one strike before we get there.

‘In your sweetest dreams.’

‘Not my best work but it was enough since we arrived at our destination and she had no time to unleash her wrath upon me.’

We both stopped in front of the store to admire it for some moments.

It was amazing, an antique store that had all sorts of clocks, toys and other objects for display.

I had to capture it, so I placed the camera into position and took a few shots of it.

I had to immortalize it, not the store itself but the older objects inside it.

They captivated me even if I couldn't see well enough, each of them held a story of its own.

A couple of shot should suffice, that way I could be sure one of them would do it justice.

‘So, shall we go in?’

‘Carla asked me after I was done. ‘Ladies first, I insist!’

‘We both got in and a bell rang announcing our arrival. As I expected, it was full of dust and cobwebs.’

Even the spiders were including among the antiquities.

I simply had to take another shot at everything there and so have I.

I felt like I was capturing the atmosphere of the place, everywhere around me, something could be encased, even the store itself looked older from the inside, almost unnaturally aged.

But that wasn't possible at all, not to mention how useless it sounded. ‘Save some for the owner you dummy, you're not filling a catalogue!’

‘She was right, even if I didn't want to admit it.’

But how could I stop when everything seemed out of this world? Perhaps it was, I wouldn't exclude that any time.

We both kept searching the place; at least, she did since I was too busy trying to take as many pictures as I could, as the owner wasn't here yet.

Strange that the door was open when we came in so he wasn't that far off.

Carla took a note out of her pocket while I was still trying to find more items to capture.

She ignored the store and everything inside it, not even batting a look on the fascinating scene.

She could at least pretend she cared about it.

Depressing old painting of withered trees no one would buy, bronze framings to pictures that cried in broken tea cups, even a replica of a lighthouse stood near a town.

It was far too dark inside of it for anyone to be there anyway. ‘Oh, there he is.’

‘He was neither too old nor too young.’

I waited my turn as she started talking to him, away from my ears and sight.

I kept on nipping until I saw a picture of a young girl.
That was a strange thing to keep in an antique store, but the purple dress she wore was even more peculiar.
Until she finished doing him, I kept looking around, a lot of books stacked upon each other, fancy names and others not.
There was one in particular at the bottom with a face on it that I found out to be quite repulsive looking.
'Those aren't for sale, please don't touch anything.' The owner almost shouted me out of the place.
Both gave me funny looks before returning to their work.
And so serious about it, as if I've done some sort of immorality. But what was he hiding?
Maybe even more, clues about my research I thought, even if the chances were slim.
The chances were divine; after all, he was someone who came from outside the town.
Carla did an amazing job distracting him from my sight and plans. Only a little longer and I would be able to get my hands on it.
I turned around, back at the prize, just a couple of the books off and I was able to.
'Okay, back off you deprived knuckle-bearer!
I already told you to back off; one more time and I'll kick both of you out.
The second strike, this time was serious and Carla was on his side too.
'Seriously stop, we're here for both work and pleasure but pleasure can wait.
Our conversation here is crucial so please calm down.
' Both turned around as if nothing happened.
I knew that he would probably kick me out but I had to know what was written in it.
The stakes were high and my desire to know was even greater.
He wouldn't expect me to try a second time, I was sure of it, this time, I waited for the right time to strike and went on with my move, and it would be a checkmate for me.
'Okay stop, this is the last straw, both of you get out of my store!' She took her time as she waited a few seconds before joining me.
I don't know what he told her but at this point I didn't care.
We both left the store as soon as she was done, far away from the shady man.
I did manage to take one last shot of him before going out towards the pissed out encephalic-abrogate.
Not only did I not get to read that book but the disappointment and annoyance in Carla's eyes didn't make it worth it.
'I can't believe you, what's with this obsession over those damn books?
Thadeon there told you so many times not to do it and you still couldn't help yourself but embarrass both of us.
' It wasn't my fault, though.
'I had to know what was written in it.
If he didn't want people to read it, he wouldn't keep it out in the open.' She was mad and I wasn't making it any better.
'Look, have you ever heard about hiding something in plain sight?
He's a mysterious man, I'm sure that's not even his real name, Thadeon. I doubt he wanted you to read it in the first place.
' Look, Carla, I'm sorry, I know I said that a lot lately but I am. At least, do we have enough for an article?
' Yes, I suppose we have.
The pictures you've taken should also suffice; at least one good thing came out of it.
' Let's just get back to the office and end the day with this article.
' Before we went on our way I managed to make her laugh at this sad situation, after all.
' How many opportunities to get warped out will you ever get?
' It was in poor taste, maybe not even that funny, but at the time, it was enough to make her smile long after we went away.
The sun was still up but the night wasn't far behind, on the road she started telling me all about this Thadeon guy.
Even if there wasn't enough about him to be told, I knew that it wasn't the last time we would see each other.
Carla didn't manage to find out about his background rather that he arrived by a carriage and decided to open a store in this town.
The rumors were nothing more than rumors in the end.
He didn't look like the type to come from a noble family and even if he did, that's the last thing we needed in these parts.
The mayor wouldn't be happy about that either, I should finish the article anyway; I've got plenty of work at home too, so it would be a bad idea to mix them up.
We weren't interrupted from our walk afterwards, strange because at this hour the postman would come to greet

us from anywhere.

He probably called in sick today.

He wasn't the only one who wasn't around; we took the long way and noticed that both the coffee shop and the flower store were closed.

'Carla, wait, I need to check something over there. 'The weather wasn't great from where I stood.

It felt like the day was going to happen all over again but it couldn't. We got closer towards Darya's store to check if there was someone inside.

I tried knocking on a door and looking through the window but there was no one inside.

The flower store was never kept closed during the day, not even when one of them got sick.

'Are you okay?'

There's a storm coming, that's why they probably closed it so soon.

'Carla didn't really see anything strange but I knew that something was brewing up.

'I hope, at least, the office isn't closed in or else all of this work was for nothing.

'The office is never closed.

The boss is too cheap to give everyone a day off. ' She said, maybe they didn't leave after all.

We made our way back to it, with rain slowly falling from the sky.

I didn't get wet since I managed to get inside fast enough but I couldn't say the same about her.

Everyone was working, even Francis was standing at his small desk, writing.

Ken was still maintaining the machine and even Rob the janitor was here, making sure there won't be any accidents anymore.

The rest of them must have come and left, even the boss.

Carla went on to start writing the article; I would join her after I finished the image processing.

The developing room wasn't too far but that wasn't the problem, I knew I said to myself that I wouldn't mix both work and my research but it would take only a few minutes, no one would know about it.

Perhaps even more because of the time it took for the images to be ready, fortunately, I had some lecture to kill some time.

I took the journal out of my bag and started going through random pages.

Of course, it was hard to see the words in the dark but I managed to do it fine.

As fine as I could do it given the circumstances.

I couldn't risk using the light and irreversibly damage the images, then again maybe it wasn't that bad, and it made me quite excited, trying to find out what's hidden in it, the hard way.

Slightly whispering, so others couldn't hear me through the wall and door I started.

'June 15, 1820, I can't believe I finally met him, someone who's just like me, kindly hearted and caring.

He's a travelling merchant and ever since we stared into each other's eyes, I couldn't stop thinking about him and his fleeing braids.

I always wanted to leave this town and explore the rest of the world and this is the perfect opportunity.

Convincing him won't be an easy task but I'm sure I'll be able to make him help me.

I hope that my next entry here will be about both of us leaving town happily ever after, like they always do in fairy tales.

Well, see you soon upcoming blooming me, I hope everything will end up well, for one of us anyway.

'I stopped for a second, not knowing who she was, except what Jon told me, and I had a bad feeling about how her journal might end.

Despite that I had to do it, it was for my research, even if it meant intruding into someone else's thoughts.

Everything I did was justified, and no one had the right to tell me otherwise.

A few pages skipped, maybe days of her life to the point of: 'Ten days passed since he left.

I'm still heartbroken; I don't know what got into him to run away like that.

Grandma told me it will pass, but I can't stop crying, he can't, he isn't that type of a person, to run away without saying a word or not even a goodbye.

I wish he'd come back, my life wouldn't be the same without him; nothing can fill that spot his absence left.

'At this point, I won't find anything relevant about the town, but in a way, I found her story interesting as if I'm unfolding someone's life before me.

One thing is strange, how come a stranger managed to leave such an impact on her?

Ten days passed and she's acting as if she's mourning his death. There's something off about this journal.

Bah.

I'm probably over thinking it to be more than it looks, it's probably just a normal journal.

The memoir got back to my backpack and it would seem like the pictures were almost done too.

I managed to use one of the solutions there to dry up the pictures and they looked fantastic, even if I haven't done much, I've really outdone myself.

When I got out, Carla and Ken were the only ones left, chit chatting before getting ready to close.
'Hey, Carla, Ken. I'm done with them.
'I showed them the pictures and they were pleased to see them. 'It's not bad; these should go well with the article.
Don't worry, it's done.
' 'I'll take care of these and the article. The new edition should be done in mere minutes.
'Ken took both the article and the pictures; they were the last ones to be inserted into the machine since everyone else left.
And quite the machine it was as it looked like something which came out of someone's dreams.
More than often it gave me the impression that if it was alive, twisting its gears, eating what we've been feeding it in exchange of what we desire, a good newspaper.
It felt like, in a way it tried communicating with me.
The fear of seeing it drown in its own ink sometimes made me quiver.
Anyway, nothing smelled better than the merely printed newspapers done by three hard working people, or, at least, one of them who just happens to be me.
I could see from their faces that both of them were exhausted and not in the mood to talk.
We waited for Ken to be done with his work so we could finally leave.
Just a few more and I'll be off, I went in to check every room so no light would be left on and none was.
I was swift, managing to fly through three of the rooms in mere seconds, beating my own past record too.
As soon as it was over, he closed the machine, placing it to sleep and went out to close the office.
The rain hasn't settled down, but I didn't live too far and the rain wasn't too dense.
We all said our goodbyes and went on our lonely separate ways. Quite a bad omen when it rains, that's what I've always thought. I hope they'll get home safe, or, at least, her.
Time to go back home before I get wet.
While walking, I couldn't help but notice how peaceful and quiet it felt all around me, the calm before a storm.
So I started walking faster until I managed to outrun the few rain drops that were trying to soak me and so I would manage to get home before the storm started.
Home sweet home, not too far from my job, not that big either but I still managed to stay warm in it.
It still beats living on the streets any day.
The key made awful sounds when entering the hole, which I thought would be another problem to fix on my never ending bucket list.
Perhaps it was time to call a professional to fix it before it got even worse.
My stomach also accompanied the chorus made of key noises, rain drops and my second gut.
With all the running around from the workplace, I had nothing to eat.
After coming in I threw my coat and boots in a corner, not even bothering to unite them and went directly to the kitchen.
I felt like a predator stalking its prey and luckily for me there was an unfinished salad waiting there.
It took me a mouth full to finish it but I can't complain since it managed to satisfy my hunger for the moment.
I finished it all with a glass of pure water before leaving the dishes in the sink.
It was time to go on from where I left on the journal.
It was so quiet that I could hear the rain drops bounce on the ground. The sound of it brought some bitter but also sweet memories.
First, the door had to be sealed tightly, with all three of the locks being closed; I didn't want to be disturbed by anybody or anything.
Not that I was being paranoid.
Now, what was the last chapter I've read?
I opened my backpack after being thrown on the ground, strange, I didn't notice it go down with my coat.
That wasn't important; I took out the journal and used the light from my desk to see where I was.
'Jon's mother was abandoned by that scoundrel.
' I thought about it for a moment before going on. It couldn't have been anyone other than him.
But it was time for me to ignore that and venture even deeper into her mind.
'June 30'No year was written down, quite peculiar.
'I can't believe he came back, he came back to apologize, he told me that it was wrong for him to try and leave me.
He told me he fell in love with me.
I don't know what to do, if he truly loved me he wouldn't have left me in the first place.
What made him decide to come back and why now?
I'm still confused about my feelings, I don't know if I love him anymore. I'm afraid he might try running away

from home again.

I wish I could talk to you but that's not going to work is it?

None of them knows, none of them seems to know what I'm planning to do. My choices are limited and I feel like I won't be able to do it alone. I have to take my chances with Jonathan.

'Either John knows something that I don't; perhaps he was named after his father.

But so far, I haven't encountered anything strange, except his family, I swear I saw something written in another language or, it must be here, somewhere.

'30 December 1821, Jonathan just asked for my hand.

I don't know why he didn't ask for more, I would have given him more. I can't believe how much he changed over this past year.

He might have made me one of the happiest encephalic-abrogate alive, or at least, that's what I wanted to feel like.

Not being able to refuse him because all of the love I had in store for him, there was no doubt about, but things changed, the others citizens and my family forbid me from ever getting close to the town exit.

I was.

We were being held as prisoners and it took me way too long to find it out.

My plans were slowly dying, the world outside should have been in my grasp but now it's beyond my reach, I lost my opportunity.

Jon made me happy but what was the point of that if I had no freedom? 'Before I could turn the page, I got distracted.

I thought I heard something coming from outside, something other than the rain.

A faint noise sounded familiar for some reason as it started getting louder.

I laid the book down on the desk and started walking slowly towards the door, closer to where the sound came from.

Curiosity started going down as the sounds started resembling growls. With each step I've made, I felt like I was getting closer to my demise.

Deep inside I thought I knew what it was but I couldn't just run and hide, I wasn't a coward anymore, not like I was back then.

The door was still locked tight, and unsealing the locks made a lot of noise.

I quickly opened the first two of them, the third one felt more like a signature, even more, ink towards my last will, even though I had nothing to offer.

The lock wasn't holding the door anymore.

My breath slowed down, close to feeling nauseous, but I still managed to grab the doorknob with both of my hands and asked myself, what could reside behind that door?

Did it come back to finish the job? A lamp sat on a drawer next to me.

I grabbed it with one of my hands so I could use it as a weapon.

What chance did I stand against it on a close encounter, especially since I knew almost nothing about it?

I can still remember that night and what that monster can do.

The chances of me getting away after a confrontation with it and still being alive were slim.

My hands were shaking, it couldn't be fear what I felt, could it?

This was not the time for me to say my last words, not that they mattered anyway.

There was no one that could hear them, at least no one around.

The door was slammed, splashing the rain water all around, with the lamp in my hand, as I looked around to see nothing.

A few more looks followed and still, nothing was out there.

I closed the door after walking back inside and put the lamp back to its place.

Maybe it was just my imagination.

Perhaps with everything going on in my life, I have truly lost my mind.

But I knew I heard something out there, my senses wouldn't betray me like that.

I had to take a break and breathe so I wouldn't fall down but the noises started again, this time coming from inside the house.

I had to grab something else to defend myself, my body was trembling but at least, I was able to think somewhat calmly, a lamp wasn't going to help me this time, that's why I placed it back in its original location.

The kitchen was the solution, I got closer and grabbed a kitchen knife, nothing was near me, and so the sounds must have come from upstairs.

It was going to happen all over again.

Stepping on each stair felt like I was barefoot, walking on glass shards, it was painful and close to getting even worse.

My heart was about to jump out of my chest, until I got there, to the second floor.
I never thought about it, but it almost resembled entirely to the same level from the attic.
There was no time for remembering, not if my life was at stake.
Four rooms, left and right, it must be in one of them, it's silent, probably waiting for me.
Holding the knife in my right hand, I opened the door on my right, hoping I would get the upper hand, but nothing inside.
A quick look around, it was too big, most likely, to even be able to hide under the bed, but I had to be sure, I approached it and bent over the floor so I could see what's there.
Afraid, I looked down under and saw only dust, there was no time to think about cleaning it, the sounds manifested again, not too far, it could be in the corridor.
Sidestepping got me closer to the open door, I had my guard up but it wasn't there, just three more rooms left.
The next one I went in was the opposite room, I was no coward, I said to myself and with a swoop it was open in an instance, but, just as before, nothing inside or under the beds.
The last two doors, I came back and felt like being at a crossroad between life and death.
That mere thought sent a chill down my spine for some reason.
I couldn't wait like that, for my life to end, I opened the first one, not there, and it could only mean that the monster was in the last room.
I started having second thoughts as it might have been or not a thief.
The growls it made were so clear but where did it come and how did it enter the house?
A headache wasn't enough to stop me, especially when I was in danger to lose my own life.
I tried ignoring them and opened the door, entering the room with all of them behind.
No, no, no, this couldn't be, the room was as empty as the others but the window was open, the wind made it even colder.
I closed it and got out of the way, maybe it was only my mind playing tricks on me, and not taking any break as I got dizzy.
I lay on the floor, too tired and weak to defend myself and the knife dropped out of my hand as I closed my eyes.
Before falling to sleep, I swear I heard it again growling. I was afraid of not making through the night.
The circumstances almost repeated themselves and, this time, I feared that the worst might happen.
There was nothing I could do but fall peacefully to sleep.
Everything fell deeply into a sea of confusion right after my eyes got sealed tight.
I was standing in front of a big table, filled with so many strange round shapes carved into the wood, a sign over each of them, a counter too with a swirly lever, with enough places for someone to place something on it.
A few coins on the table waited for someone to use them, yet another set of strange symbols onto them with meanings that I did not understand.
I wasn't alone either, at the end of the table stood an old lady who must've been the dealer, she had another smaller table near her, going through other strange symbols too.
Her hands were brittle and her sight felt like it could deceive me.
Near her, there were two other people, an encephalic-abrogate, tall but short, dressed in black and blooming with sorrow.
She kept staring at a card that lay in her hand, almost ready to burst into tears.
There was a faint light reflected on her card but there wasn't any source of light coming from anywhere.
On the other side, there was a young man with his back turned, I thought I recognized him from somewhere but I couldn't place my finger on it.
Covered in shadows, he kept his right hand on the left one, holding a strange sphere like object with a card stuck in-between.
He didn't look any brighter either.
'Last one for this night, it would seem like it's your turn precursor, pick three coins.
'Her voice surprised me as I wasn't used to talking to people in my dreams, let alone take orders from them.
Not to mention how the lemony aroma surrounding us made me stay in my place.
Something compelled me to play this game.
A feeling of closure of some sort but I didn't know why.
'Oh, I'm sorry, right away.
'I did as she pleased and took three of the coins laying on the table without knowing what they meant, on them, the images of a blindfolded encephalic-abrogate, a broken chest and a scarred spawn laid forth.
'What now?
' I asked her, still not sure of myself. Still not sure if my decision was right.
She pointed towards the part of the table where the symbols laid and told me to place the coins on three

adjacent spots towards my heart inspire.

As she said, so did I comply again, placing them on three random spots and I still didn't know.

'What does any of these mean?

' 'It's easy my dear, it's your turn to turn the lever, have you not played the game before?

'She giggled even before I responded her.

Reluctantly I said no, before I turned the lever around, twisting it with grace.

The three coins I place shaped themselves into cards right in front of my eyes, but I couldn't see the images engraved on them.

I didn't know why they were so blurred out but there was something behind all that dust and mist.

'Go ahead and place them on the upper half of the counter and turn the lever again, I don't have all day.

' 'I'm sorry; I still don't see the point of it. ' 'Just do it so we can all go.

' A grim tone came from behind the man before going silent.

If I didn't know any better I would have thought that it came from something else than a human being.

Throughout this whole session, she never loses eye contact with me; at least, if what the young man said was true, I could escape her unnerving stare.

I started placing those cards, one by one when, before placing the last one, next to the others as I wanted to, something inside me told me not to do it.

Instead, I had to place it one at the top of each other, before going on and turning the lever.

Those cards merged together into a small deck of cards after doing so.

The old encephalic-abrogate was so excited to announce a winner, making the encephalic-abrogate standing next to her even sadder for an unknown reason.

'Yes, finally we got a winner, congratulations for getting an entire day at the festival during the day of the dead.

'It took me a while to get it, but they both held cards, I was the only one who had a deck, yet I still didn't get it.

Have I cheated?

Did I deserve the visit?

'No, you know what, you can give the visit to her, and I've got other things to take care off anyway.

' 'Well if you're so sure about it, don't forget, no take backs. ' 'Don't worry, I won't!

'The encephalic-abrogate stopped crying before turning towards me.

I wasn't able to see her that well before blacking out, just a small pearl necklace.

There's no way for me to describe how I felt during the rest of the night since I'm not entirely sure myself, but if I had to describe it, the rest felt like a dark void.

I returned back to not being able to see or feel anything, I can't feel like I'm touching the ground anymore, falling, floating or even if I had a body.

Time became meaningless for a while, the moment I had consciousness, the sooner the next day began as if nothing happened.

The morning came, or maybe it was passed noon, the light came from above me; I was still alive I guessed, with a big knife lying next to me.

I didn't remember it being so close to me, ugh and my head felt like it was going to burst in any second now.

It must have been a crazy night.

Thankfully I don't have to work this day so I could resume my other work. Right after I eat and place this back to its place.

Before resuming my daily activities, I checked every room again so I would be sure of it.

A proper investigation was in order for me to find out what truly happened.

But I won't be able to do it alone, at least not with an empty stomach. The kitchen and the rest of the room were untouched.

It didn't come from the front door then, also, I believe I forgot to turn off the light on the desk.

I turned it off before taking two eggs from the basket; I started the fire and broke them off the frying pan, not too shabby I'd say.

It went too smooth; enough that I didn't even need to add the oil.

After looking at it, I was glad I didn't get to, from some odd reason, its color changed to Agrippa as it went stale.

I enjoyed the rest of my meal on a plate with two slices from a loaf of bread; luckily I've already had the knife near me so slicing them was easy.

While eating, I couldn't help myself but think about what happened last night unless Carla decides to come early to sniff around and disturb my investigation.

Come to think of it, she's my friend and I'm being too hard on her sometimes.

Maybe I should tell her I'm sorry.

Out of the corner of my eye, I was able to see something or someone. Perhaps I was even hungrier than I

thought if I started seeing things.

I ate as quickly as possible, too troubled to want more made me stop from doing so.

Perhaps it was time to go back there and search for anything that could help me, the only clue I was aware of was the open window, but harder cases have been solved over fewer clues so I can't complain.

Before going back upstairs, I took a look at the front door, supposedly the monster tried coming through the main entrance and since it failed, it tried coming in through the window, on the other side.

I don't remember placing a chair in front of the door, with a swipe I threw it away and kept searching for clues.

First I start seeing things and now I this?

Something is definitely not right with me.

I will seek help after I find out the truth.

If it really came, there must be footprints or paw prints, even scratches around.

The door wasn't locked so I had no problem going outside to check, but there was no mark on the ground, the rain must have covered any trace, the sun was beating my eyes directly, I wasn't able to stand too much outside for that reason.

On my way back in and towards the room where it might have happened, I started doubting myself, except hearing noises there was nothing that I could hold as proof of the encounter.

Before checking in, I entered the room and changed my clothes, I should have done that as the first thing after waking up, even with my hunger.

Anything from the closet would suffice.

I took the first suit and tie I saw, throwing it at me while dismissing my other clothes on the bed.

Then I thought what if Carla came and saw that mess?

I turned around to get them, that's when I saw the window again, the same one that was open last night.

Just as I thought, it had scratch marks all over its frame.

As I tried feeling it, I got a splinter almost cut a decent part of finger right as I went through it.

How did I manage to miss that?

It felt refreshing knowing that I didn't go insane.

Far from being happy though as the thought of it being real brought a burning sensation inside.

If there really was a monster, the same one from ten years ago, the other citizens must have seen or heard about it, where could I start looking and asking though?

Most of the shops were closed yesterday so I doubt there was even one out there that didn't follow the rest.

Except the town tavern might have kept open, it's not possible that the same events that happened before repeated themselves, right?

I got out and closed the door behind me, I had to know, and I can't stand that monster taking, even more, people.

I splashed the puddles below my boots, too concerned for them that I didn't care; I couldn't care about anything else.

On the middle of the road I stopped and asked myself, why would I go there?

I'm sure they're fine and nothing happened to them, they couldn't have kept it open.

No, I refuse to believe that history will repeat itself. I don't know with whom should I speak, except.

The wind threw a small rose petal in front of me, I couldn't tell if it was a sign but Darya came to mind, she works at her father's flower store, maybe she saw something when she was out, and it's worth a shot.

Disregarding my previous plan, I started walking to her store; I really hoped it was open.

Most of the stores in this town kept a tight schedule but hers wasn't like the rest.

The sun settled down now, it wasn't hurting my eyes as it once did, hard to believe it only took minutes.

On my way there I met Alex but I didn't have enough time to talk to him, it seemed like we never had.

'Hi, Alex, strange meeting you so early, by any chance, have you seen?'

'He couldn't talk to me either before passing me, he managed to say: 'I can't talk, got people to help, bye.'

'I didn't manage to tell him goodbye and he could have been more, well mannered.'

I couldn't be mad at him, not when I was so close to uncovering the truth.

I was at the store and it was open, now it was, the moment of truth, I entered it and said: 'Hello Darya, is your father here?'

'She smiled at me and nodded her head, I couldn't ask her what she saw but, on the other hand, I could ask him.'

'Can I see your father Darya? It's really important.'

'She nodded her head again but as a sign of refusal. Beyond that, Darya started looking around for something.'

I had to keep it simple.

I never took the time to learn the sign language but I had other ways of speaking with her.

They closed earlier last night so there must have been a reason for that.

But she couldn't try to describe the whole day, unless she had something to do it with.

'Darya, do you have something to write on?

'She started looking at the counter and under the flower pots but didn't show me anything.

After that, she went back to the room behind her and vanished in there. I hope she had a hidden ace somewhere around there.

I had no other options to communicate with her.

So I waited and after a couple of seconds, she came back with a pen and some paper.

Now, same as before, I wouldn't want to pressure her, even with her paper.

'Thanks for helping me, I really appreciate it. Now, have you seen anything yesterday?

Anything unexplainable?

'She started writing on the paper for some time, right before handing it over to me, it read: 'I haven't seen anything unusual, my father told me to close it early but I couldn't figure why.

'In the paper, she also asked me if I was feeling all right but I chose not to read that part out loud.

Instead, I told her: 'Thanks for asking me but if I was feeling bad, I would have told you.

'I gave her the pages back and noticed the uneasiness on her face as if she didn't eat my lie.

It didn't take her long to finish and through it, she told me that I looked agitated but that wasn't all, she did want to help me because we're friends.

I didn't think she would believe me even if I told her.

After all, even Jon dismissed me and most likely thought I should be sent to the asylum.

'I can't really tell you, for your own protection, but please, if your father saw or heard anything; could you ask him to see me?

It's at an utmost importance!

'After taking the paper back again, she didn't write anything in the first few seconds.

But after that, she decided to help me.

As she did it, though, she tried looking away, concerned about something. She wrote down, why don't you go and ask him yourself?

He got up early and went to the local market to buy some fruits. A long shot but if I was fast enough, I could catch up to him. 'Thank you, I'll see you later.

'I told her before dashing out of the store, almost hitting one of the clients who tried entering it.

There was no time for me to apologize to the scruffy man.

I had to be fast if I wanted to get to the market in the Spring Street in less than twenty minutes.

It was far safer than using a carriage with all these accidents happening lately.

After all, of this is over, I should buy her a gift.

She really did bring me a lot of help and this isn't the only time she did so.

I can still remember, a couple of years ago, when I was still trying to get used to this town.

I was running errands and I fell right in front of her father's store, with both of my legs broken and in pain.

At the time, I don't think she decided if she would take it not the family business, the think is that, even if we didn't know each other that well, she was the first and only one to come to my aid, before calling a doctor.

She wasn't able to call him but that didn't make her back down for the task.

Darya searched everywhere until she found the doctor and brought him to me.

That's her, always trying her best to help me and never asking anything in return.

She's so different than anyone I've ever met, leaving me nothing but guilt for not repaying her enough.

Despite that, she keeps being kind, making me feel bad and good at the same time.

I wish I could say the same about the rest of the people from this town, but a lot of them wouldn't even bother to acknowledge my existence.

Sometimes, I even wonder if they're worth saving, or being thought about.

In the end it wasn't that bad, I had my leg sealed up for a week, and got to see her almost on a daily basis, in a way I was glad it happened.

The market wasn't too far, just in time, I thought, mister Rimershot shouldn't be that far.

He must have known something that his daughter didn't, why else would he close his store right before a monster attack?

I need to try to find him, he's too important to let him slip through my fingers.

Another chill went through my spine, this time, it got worse. There wasn't any reason for it to come and go like that.

I had no time to think about it, not anymore; as I reached the placed and realized that it wasn't going to be an easy task.

It was full of people browsing through the stands for fruits and vegetables, from left to right, or maybe it was from right to left, I always got that confused.

Rim could be anywhere here unless he finished and left back home, I had to appeal to one of the vendors if I

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