

# MADNESS & MONSTERS

AN ANTHOLOGY OF CREEPY STORIES



BY PHILIP A. LEE

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&  
MONSTERS

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PHILIP A. LEE

怪談回

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For Carrie,  
who makes darkened corners a little less scary

Words, like angels, are powers which have invisible power over us . . . personal presences which have whole mythologies: genders, genealogies . . . histories, and vogues; and their own guarding, blaspheming, creating, and annihilating effects.

—James Hillman, psychologist

A man who has not passed through the inferno of his passions has never overcome them.

—Carl Jung, psychoanalyst

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# FOREWORD

BY BILL BICKNELL

Normal, healthy adults don't believe in monsters . . . *necessarily*.

The word “monsters” calls to mind a variety of images—bogeymen lurking under beds or in closets, Lovecraftian horrors lying in wait beneath the sea, shambling automatons from a mad scientist's lab. We read about these beasts, we shiver a bit, and we laugh. They're scary, sure, but it's not as if they're *real*.

Philip A. Lee doesn't deal in these sorts of monsters, but the beasts in his book will unsettle you in different ways. Instead, Philip is a master of parallels; when he holds the mirror up to nature, something disturbing crawls out of it.

What horrors await a priest who seeks the secrets of his guardian angel? What has transformed an old friend into an unknowable cipher? What mysteries hide within a discarded set of toys? And what fate awaits a supernatural temptress who finds herself questioning her very nature?

Within these stories and more—some of them magical, some of them conventional—monstrous truths stand as stark parallels to what is seemingly good . . . or simply mundane. How Philip's protagonists face these challenges will determine what fates await them. Some may find strength or validation; others will only find madness.

But regardless of the result, the monsters of *Monsters & Madness*—creatures of myth, of mind, and of flesh—will leave you squirming. You may not believe in monsters, but the stories in this collection might make you stare long and hard at the mirror, wondering where the creatures are really hiding.

# INTRODUCTION

If you're wondering why this book is described on the cover as an anthology collection of "creepy stories" rather than "horror stories," here's your answer.

I've never been a fan of the kind of horror movies that rely on things jumping out at you when it's dead quiet, the kind that go for a "real" scare after the fake "Oh, it's just you" scare, or the ones that rely on copious amounts of gore and viscera solely to elicit shock or revulsion from the audience. Instead, I've always admired the kind of movies that drench the story in a well-crafted ambiance. Think of walking into a poorly lit mansion and seeing the owner's collection of porcelain dolls, all of which are staring at you. Think of that neighbor who doesn't seem all there, the one that's always in his backyard at night and watches you when you get out of your car. Think of that old, musty basement when the light bulb's burnt out and the door closes behind you.

In my opinion, these types of scenarios are far more powerful than pure shock factor. People exposed to violence and bloodshed can become inured to it after awhile, but that soft scritch coming from behind the closet door, the whistle coming from a badly sealed doorframe, the tapping of a leafless branch against a windowpane—these things will always put a chill down one's spine.

This idea dovetails into true horror being a deeply personal thing. Some people are so afraid of spiders that they need someone else to kill them, while others give spiders the bottom of their shoe without thinking twice about it. Some people can be bored by a slasher film while others will curl up into a ball at a specific scene, despite the inherent suspension of disbelief involved when watching a movie.

Because horror is intensely personal, it's probably no surprise that, of all the protagonists in this collection, only one has a name. This wasn't a deliberate choice while I was writing these stories, but in retrospect it demonstrates a fundamental truth that these sorts of things could happen to anyone, that each narrator is an everyman capable of encountering monsters or madness at any time, around any corner.

When reading through this collection, remember that what scares you might not necessarily scare someone else. For every person who



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suffers from arachnophobia, there's someone else with a boot and a grudge against spiders.

PHILIP A. LEE

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## WHEN COMETH THE ANGEL

When a faltering wagon cart suddenly hits a rut in the cobble and misses crushing you by mere inches, that, I always told my granddaughter Imogen, is your guardian angel shoving the cart aside. When the rheumatic fever or the typhoid plagues the body yet does not kill you, that is because your guardian angel fought the pathogens on your behalf and returned your soul to health. Anything heathens attribute to good fortune—a windfall, a close brush with death, a chance reunion of old friends—that is your guardian angel manipulating the course of fate into favorable trade winds.

These beings, I would tell Imogen, meet reality for but a moment, only long enough to kiss their charges with divine love before returning to their own plane.

I have known of my guardian angel's existence ever since I was six years old. My mother claimed the fever from the pox had addled my mind, but I could see my protector through bleary, rheumy eyes, if only for a moment. Phantom fingers embraced my cheeks, and when I looked up, I saw the most beautiful creature I could ever imagine: milky skin, feminine limbs with masculine power, and the most wondrous crystalline eyes filled with the softest kindness and the hardest resolve.

Six years later, this wondrous creature kept runaway hansom horses from trampling me. At thirty-three, it averted German bombs so their blast destroyed my pagan neighbor's house instead. Some considered me a lucky fellow, but I would tell them luck had nothing to do with the countless near-scrapes I endured to reach this ripe old age. A secret benefactor was responsible for my success, I would say to them, and they would immediately ask my silent partner's name.

This set me to wondering: did my angel possess a name? And if so, how could I learn what it was?

My colleagues at the university, they laughed when I broached this rather peculiar conjecture. My associates and I, we have always argued about the value of what lies beyond our eyes. As learned men of repute and tenure, most of them considered the idea rubbish, but I always argued devil's advocate in favor of the preternatural merely to stimulate discourse amongst my peers. I would ask them about miraculous

occurrences that had happened to them, things they could not explain away by scientific reasoning. They said it was chance. Fortune. Fate.

In the furtherance of my studies, it came to my attention that pagans throughout history have repeatedly attempted to call forth demons. They seek not to control or subdue them but to gain their knowledge or perhaps curry their favor. In 1909, Aleister Crowley and Victor Neuberg claimed to have successfully summoned a demon, one whom many pagan scholars believe to be the archdemon Satan himself, and that they had stolen its secrets. As a counterpoint, I came across many tales of people communicating with their guardian angels during deep meditation or near-death experiences, but these were the angels of paganism, not the divine messengers of God Almighty. I read through any theological tome in the university library that contained any reference to angels or demons, and not once did I find mention of someone attempting to call forth a brother of Michael or a cousin of Gabriel.

What, I asked myself, was the loftier ideal: to probe the depths for Belial's secrets or to touch the very mind of God?

I partook of Eucharist the next Sabbath and shared my private thoughts with the priest in his offices after Mass. He eyed me with intense scrutiny, and for a moment, I thought he would prescribe penance from the look on his face.

"Be careful what you wish for, Doctor," he said. "The mind of God is too powerful a thing for earthen vessels such as we."

When I explained that I only wished to commune with my guardian angel, he wagged a finger and said, "My child, what makes you believe God does not know His angels better than He knows us? They are His first, perfect in every way, as He is. We are His flawed creatures, and to touch something so sacred could bring disastrous repercussions to he who is prideful enough to believe it can be done."

I left the cathedral with a famine of ideas in my head and an emptiness in my heart. I had grown so enamored of the notion that having its very integrity impugned by the only soul I considered a friend in the matter left me a broken and disconsolate spirit. Was it not the goal of every good Catholic to better know the mind of God? Was it not my good, Christian duty to strive to understand His ways?

After three months' time, I felt I was building another Tower of Babel, like I was sailing across the Sea of Galilee in a storm, never to find the other side. I called upon the powers that be to help me find a

way. And lo! in the midst of reading the Holy Scriptures, I received an epiphany.

From the Prophet Isaiah, chapter fourteen: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!”

Angels were demons who had not yet fallen and thus could be called forth in similar ways.

In utmost secrecy, I read as much as I could on subjects no Christian would ever dream of touching to find the truth. Many books I purchased from shadowed figures in dark alleys—witches and practitioners of magic that did not wish open persecution. Forgotten, annotated books about séances, symbols, and arcane incantations. Handwritten treatises of the nature and disposition of all known demonic entities. After several months of arduous research, I knew more about ancient religions and magic than I would have thought prudent ten years before. Pick a mantra from the Vedas, a *galdr* chant from *Runes of the Nine Worlds*, a spell from a Hermetic grimoire—I could recite them all.

For each pagan concept, I found a morally superior reciprocal. Death became life. Darkness became light. Sacrificial blood became blessed wine. Occult incantation became Scripture quotation.

Still I went to Mass each Sunday, if only to remind myself that I was fulfilling my good Christian duty, albeit in ways the priest did not understand. I read the Good Book as much as I read Crowley’s *The Vision and the Voice*. I wanted to know how he had enticed Beelzebub and thus learn how to bait a true, Christian angel of protection.

I planned the ritual for Easter Sunday instead of Samhain, and I began my preparations at first light instead of waiting for nightfall. The flowers and grass of my garden were a perfect substitute for a summoner’s candlelit pentagram; my Holy Bible became my grimoire.

The triangle of evocation I drew in the sod of my summoning ground represented the Holy Trinity; there lay no maleficence in that. And the wine used to seal the triangle had been blessed and taken from the Church. Nothing unholy there. I had spent a fortnight drafting an incantation of my own based on the Scriptures. Latin replaced the Enochian summoning language and thus removed all sense of paganism from my work.

From a blessed flame, I began the ceremony. I had stolen it also from the cathedral, having carried it away in secret after it was blessed for Vespers and covered it with a tin to ensure it would not blow out before I could begin. With it, I lit the paschal candle and dropped five

grains of incense into the flame.

Amidst the heady scent, I pierced the candle with a knife five times, the stabs representing the five wounds of the Christ. I lifted the column of wax and dipped its base into a silver basin of holy water, also blessed and taken in secret from my congregation. This ablutionary act symbolized the Christ's baptism and was intended to purify my soul from any evil that might have seeped into it, any contact taint from the books of darkness I had secretly been studying.

With a deep breath, I spoke my invocation to the sky.

"*In nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti,*" I began. "May the Holy Ghost bless this mortal place with the gift of knowledge and communion."

And thus set in motion events I was powerless to stop.

Spring winds blew while I meditated upon Scripture and threatened to extinguish the blessed candle. The sun darkened while I called forth the name of God. More than any other desirable thing, I wished to know my guardian angel as I knew others, so I persisted. I wanted to touch the sacred as He has touched the rest of this world. I wanted to prove my fellows wrong.

After a long passage of time, the light through my eyelids waned. Night hailed me when I chanced to look. How long had it been since I had started? Minutes? Hours? The daylight had expired much sooner than I had anticipated, and the biting wind grew all the colder.

Only by the melting candle flame and the silvery moonlight could I see. In my ruminations, I noticed I had scuffed away a portion of the evocation triangle with my shoe during my meditations; this more than likely was the cause for my failure thus far. From the flagon of wine, I carefully poured more onto the broken triangle to reseal it, but as I did so, some splashed against my fingers. It was warm despite the wind. When I looked closer, I saw that it was not wine but blood. Actual blood.

I am not a man of faint heart, but this sight so disturbed my rational mind that I gasped and accidentally dropped the flagon. It shattered into a thousand pieces, inexplicably dousing fresh blood onto my flower garden, just outside the triangle. Any pagan magician would have found this spilt blood outside of the triangle a disastrous omen; I took it for a favorable sign. At the Last Supper, the Christ had turned the wine into his blood, and on Easter Sunday, no less, this was a fortuitous portent.

The splattered crimson quickened my faith, so I continued my

spiritual quest with renewed fervor. The recitations of Scripture came faster than I could speak, the words a muddle in my mouth.

From the epistles of Saint Paul: *My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.*

From the prophet Jeremiah: *Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not.*

My head became hot from the strain. My heart raced.

After a time, I felt prickles dotting across my forehead. My side soon ached as though I had run harder than accustomed to. Then my ankles started to hurt. At first, I thought this was because I had been sitting on them for far too long, but not until I felt stabbing pain pierce my wrists did I realize what had happened.

When I opened my eyes, I saw that the blood from the flagon had not only splashed the ground outside the triangle, but it had stained my wrists, my shirt, and my shoes. I had manifested the stigmata, the holy sign of the Catholic faith, the truest personification of sympathy with the Christ's suffering. But as I gently touched the representative wounds, I winced; they ran as deep as though they were real.

Each beat of my heart pumped more of my lifeblood into the ground. Crimson filled the triangle of the Trinity and poured out through the design until the lines could no longer be seen.

I recall little of what transpired past this moment, but suffice it to say I remember losing consciousness. But this unconsciousness was not that of the comatose: each and every thing happening around me I could see. I could walk around my own body, mutilated with the five holy marks, and see the hideous face the ceremony had bestowed upon me—wild eyes, arched brows, mouth twisted in malevolent glee. For the longest time, I thought I was dead, that I drifted through the ether towards purgatory, heaven, or—God forbid—hell. But my physical body still breathed, still heaved up and down.

And then the most incredible light assaulted me from behind. This was not “white light” as a physicist might define. No, it was *whiter* than white, whiter than white could ever be, if you take my meaning. I was blinded but had no eyelids to close. I felt naked in the light, and when I turned, not even my ethereal hands could clothe that terrible, shameful sensation.

Amidst the blazing white, it stood before me with naked arms outstretched. Hair the color of gold bathed its shoulders, and its open eyes radiated the same color as the blinding light, as if the eye sockets

bored holes right through its head to reveal the pure whiteness behind it.

And it was as beautiful as I had remembered as a child. For a moment, it looked like a woman unclothed, the most extravagant female form I have ever seen in my time on this earth. Had I still been in my body, I would have fallen prey to all manner of fleshly lusts, all unspeakable debauchery and depravity. Then it became male, then female, slowly shifting back and forth between the two extremes before settling on pure androgyny.

Ever so timidly, I asked the angel its name.

“My name,” it said in such a dreamy, watery voice, “is Damien.”

If my etymological roots served me well, “Damien,” I recalled, meant “one who subdues.”

A curious name for an angel.

I asked if it was my guardian angel, the one who had spared me from the pox, saved me from the runaway horses, deflected the Nazi bombs.

It nodded and beckoned me to come closer.

How could I refuse such beauty, such radiance? After all, if this had safely ushered me into my middle years, how could I not feel obligated by a debt of obedience? With a smile, I approached my divine savior and clasped hands with it. Its skin was softer than the most gentle baby flesh, and when it laughed, I felt the whole world lift from my shoulders.

Out of sincerest respect and, dare I say, love, I asked my angel what it wanted from me. After all, it had given me so much; anything I would offer in return could never hope to repay the debt I had accumulated in this life.

“Look into my eyes,” Damien said. “Look deep into my eyes and you will know.”

Regardless of how much as I wanted to look into the light, those empty eyes unsettled me. Anyone faced with an eyeless skull would feel the same, but the light itself was so entrancing. The closer I came to those fathomless eyes, the more I realized they were not eyes at all. Its eye sockets did indeed tunnel straight through the creature’s head, through brain and bone alike.

I recoiled, but the angel’s grip remained firm. Its thin, white lips pursed into a hard line. “You would do well to obey,” it said, its voice no longer the soft comfort it had once been. “Look deeper.”

And while I gazed frightfully into the holes, the light I saw through

the angel's empty eyes changed into a reddish orange fire. Then, with a gasp, it became the color of blood. Through the angel's eyeholes, I stared straight at the blood splattered across the now-dying flowers in my garden. The wine-turned-blood and the scarlet still issuing from my mortal coil had completely obliterated the summoning triangle in the grass.

"See here what you have done," boomed the angel, a hint of pleasure in its voice, "and remember. Because of you, I have fallen like Lucifer, and your ritual of ignorance has freed me into the world."

When I pulled away from the eyes, the angel's face was no longer beautiful. Its soft skin was rough, its limbs twisted into dead tree branches, and its ugly, misshapen face lost every hint of the kindness it once possessed. But its eyes were still holes to nowhere.

In tears I told the angel I would banish it back to the realm from whence it came, having read ways of banishing.

"You cannot banish what you cannot control," said the angel.

It smiled. The world blackened, and I felt my spirit being sucked back into my body. I heard laughter and my own screams, and then I knew no more.

It is said that bad luck and ill fortune befell Aleister Crowley for the rest of his life because he had not properly banished the demon he had summoned. Now I know how the poor man felt. Often I wonder if he knew how much strife and evil in the world his personal demon had caused. Had he sat there and watched his demon destroy everything he'd ever held dear, perverted every grain of truth in his life's work, and sown seeds of discord throughout the world that led to untamable conflict?

When I awoke in the sanitarium, my heart fell into utter despair. I had no inkling of what the angel had planned to do with its newfound freedom, but the mere thought of the lurid machinations it was capable of sent me into a terrible panic. Nurses would often burst in and find me writhing on the floor, foaming at the mouth, and threatening to swallow my tongue.

Only my dearest Imogen visited me. Each time my granddaughter stopped by, I could sense my guardian angel's growing agitation. The last time I ever saw her or my tormentor, I watched helplessly as the fallen angel followed her out of my room.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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