

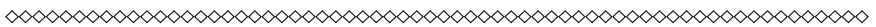
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For a masthead, contributor bios, and .pdf downloads, seek us out online at www.penandanvil.com/grimoire. Follow us on Twitter @[rattleandrictus](https://twitter.com/rattleandrictus).

While I Pondered

Poe left us no clue, no sign or detail
On how to pronounce his most gruesome tale.
Some think it's "Ber-eh-nee-chay," some think it's
 "Berneese,"
From the pain of not knowing one longs for surcease.

Had he been more caring, inclined to disclose,
He would have included some verse with the prose.
An epigraph sparkling with sonorous rhyme
Would have answered a question that boggles the mind:

*It was a dark, dreary night for the mournful Berenice,
But a darker and drearier one for her niece.*

*If I had my way, in the coffin she'd stay,
That toothsome, dark beauty, sweet Berenice.*

Yes, either of these would have settled the point
And left English majors far less out of joint,
With more time to solve another Poe riddle:
Ulalume, Ula**LUME**, or the "la" in the middle?

Valerie Nieman

Tinder

I am the woman your mother
warned you about.

I am boiling bones boiling bones boiling bones.
I am washing out war-rags at the ford,
blood pluming downstream
from hearts pierced to the fletching.

My pet is a scrofulous cur, my cage bird
a dobsonfly all wings and jaws.
I am scraping scraping scraping
the pegged skin of the world.

I turn over rocks.
I find what I expect to find.

My Hanging

1692

Dangling, plunging in air,
pumping inside my hood,
should I have confessed?
No matter, we all destroy our Garden.
– Heaven eternal! – the knot twisted: I live!
Are my skirts still knotted at the ankles?
My feet grope for the ladder.
Friends, spectators, bruit my shame.
They say you can last an hour
till beheading.
All right, witch!
My parish, breathe
lighter. I am your dirt.

Peter Schmidt

Macabre Palaver

Jack-o-lantern
nimble, jack-
o-lantern quick,
it seems Jack has swallowed
an old candle-stick.

Jack has a hole
on the top
of his skull, so
no one knows
why his toothy grin grows.

Long night's crypt tick
tocks closer
each time; make
a wish on the wick:
mystery's hermetic.

Jack-o-lantern
nimble, jack-
o-lantern quick,
poor Jack's smashed to bits
by a pendulum-stick.

Bill Direen

Gravedigger's Song

translated from the French of Georges Brassens

God knows, I get no kick from others' pain,
I wish no man ill and I don't complain,
But if there were no more deceased
I'd be the one celebrating the least!
I'm just a poor gravedigger.

The living think I have no shame nor dread
To make an easy buck from ditching the dead.
People are hurtful, but y' know,
I'm always sorry to see them go.
I'm just a poor gravedigger.

And the more I let my feelings run,
The more I'm the victim of their thoughtless fun.
They say I'm killing time at my post,
They say I look like I've seen a ghost.
I'm just a poor gravedigger.

A time to be born. A time to die.
The Preacher's wisdom just makes me cry.
When I hear those bells and drums
I just can't take death as it comes.
I'm just a poor gravedigger.

These are my thoughts, fair Death, g'bye!
If down the hole you meet God on high
Tell him I shovel as well as I can
But it's a hell of a job for a man
To be a poor gravedigger.

Joseph VanBuren

Soul Harvest

Samhain night
skyclad we dance in moonlight
and to the spirits watching
sing.

Bonfire burns
as ancient voice returns
to chant enchanted words
unheard.

Trick or treat
or both in haunted feast
consumed by this possessed
unrest.

Herakles

Herakles you got drunk in a haunted house
I know you were just trying to make it through the night

it was perverse to be kept there
the room dark with the light snatched out
you could hear the blood spilling
even above the shuddering ache of those anguished spirits
screaming at you to get out
you took a drink for your nerves again

Did the screaming remind you of your children?
you took a drink for your nerves again,
did the horror of the scene stir
the monster rotting inside you?
Get out,
Get out,
you took a drink for your nerves again.

Is the house trying to reject you,
to do what the host was too weak to do?
You heard him say he would build her likeness,
a life-size doll of her, Alcestis,
a false body to hold in bed,
to sit with at dinner,
to whisper to: *Alcestis*.

You came when she was half-dead,
when the halls rang out with shock and fury,
with sinister mourning, beating breasts
for a breast still beating
with a heart still warm,
screams for a voice still breathing.

You took a drink for your nerves again.
Not everyone can see what you can see, Herakles,
perhaps it is the prison of being born from a god,
or the vision Hera gave you, a madness never leaving.
Cursed with a sight you can't trust,
cursed with a sight that won't leave your head,
a sight that replaced your children with some wicked vision
false evil slain became small bodies again
who had begged you their father
with gentle voice to remember
yourself
before with your enormous strength
you slew the false evil
your enormous strength
your violent club
false evil
darling children
false vision (O Madness) false vision true evil
true curse true madness

and the walls are screaming
and death is a guardian drinking
blood from graves
and the house is shrieking
and you take a drink for your nerves again

How would it feel, Herakles, to crush
death in your enormous strength
with your hulking body,
with your roaring voice,
to hold death still in your arms
for a moment,
for a moment, to let your throat
become raw with the scraping
of your own mourning escaping
from your god-trapped body,
your semi-mortal voice betraying
an endless despair
to deafen death
to force the surrender of at least
one life

Herakles your strength could stun
death itself
you took a drink for your nerves
haunted godhead body you
exorcise some part of you
you seize upon the anguish to fortify these walls where
a haunting will not happen

you end a ghost story
you shouldn't have been here
but where else could you possibly go?
who else could possibly take
the raw, wrong anguish
of this house
and smother it in his arms?

Katharyn Howd Machan

Wise Woman Talks About Her Sister, the One Most People Shun

When Death comes riding on her crimson broom,
heed her. Sing praises to her copper eye
that counts silk threads before they reach the loom
and spiders them to patterns a dark sky
calls friend. Her voice will moan your name again,
again dance splendid in her wild silk dress
to all the music she can make as men
and women whirl between heart's no and yes.
Her smile? A snake's revenge. Her hands? Two thorns
torn swiftly from a wilting rose. Her flight
has magicked her between the curving horns
of moon that offer respite from deep night.
Embrace her; kiss the place her teeth and tongue
swear love, where you will be forever young.

El Coco

hides in dark corners of their dreams
waiting is his game and
dreams are many
small scarlet hearts
present palpitating morsels
for the hallow old being
the children sudden in their awakening
shudder at the wounded red sky
forgetting, they rush to the fields, into the jagged
break of day
they run
 they skip
 they jump
 into crisp turquoise air
at dusk they fall
 fall into throbbing darkness
to find
 small respite
 in raspy ravenous dreams

P.M.F. Johnson

Carving the Pumpkin

The ritual performed with just a knife,
but all the children know instinctively
how joyfully distressing that can be.
We plot the canny mockery of life,
then pierce the grotesque face – disturbed ballet:
the arabesque of eyes, the pirouette
around the scalp, the lifting out of wet
brain seeds and sticky strings, each sharp jeté
to carve the broken horror of a mouth.
We hope that by its evil glow within
this gourd will make the loathsome goblins spin
and flee like stumbling soloists gone south.
Such ghoulish satisfaction found in fright:
our masque of artistry against the night.

In the Boneyard

Skeletons abound
that are not
made of bone.

Sometimes
wind

occasional
rose

mostly a face
forgotten

that fills
out its frame

without mercy.

Time is no clock

but a dance
sat out
one evening.

Drink in hand
we discuss.

History does
not bear repeating.

Life flies
by with gnats.

I no longer know
who you are,
who I am.

Someone's skeleton.

Someone's flesh.

All Hallow's Rune

Night ring of twenty-six jade yellow eyes;
the forest deep, a cauldron steams: "Tis time,"
a demon cries. "Tis time, black cats arise!"
Dark felines yowl, they shriek! in malkin rhyme.

The demon purrs, "*Yfel* has barred the sun:
the *darkness* rules; unseal the ancient rune.
Wax vile, my pets: Mischief, mayhem be done!
The night is nigh, behold: ascends the moon."

A goblin feeds the cauldron's witching brew:
dark root of Druid oak, sawtooth of shark,
hemlock, bright dragon scales, spittle of shrew,
black snake, an owlet's wing, red heart of lark.

"Felines arise," the hell-born demon cries:
"Come witches, fly! Eclipse the *hallowed* moon.
The night is yours. 'Tis time, 'tis time: Arise!
Go forth, heed now the spell: *All Hallow's' Rune.*"

Dark shadows rise, black birds of Halloween.
Upon the pagan moon, a visage looms:
peaked hat, hooked nose; pallor, a sickly green.
Crones, cat clawed, *assail* astride their brooms.

E. M. Schorb

Ghost Shop

Previously closed because of death,
we've reopened due to health.
Come, try our Whispering Breath,
try our Inherited Wealth.

Get all you'll need of something black,
or a sheet of glowing white.
Located just across the track,
we stay open through the night;

But by days our shop is shut
because the staff must get some sleep.
So if you're in a lifelong rut,
come by night, but creep, creep, *creep*.

from the editor: a note in parting

HALLOWEEN HAS ALWAYS HELD A SPECIAL PLACE in my (cold, unbeating) heart. It's like an extended masquerade; for one night a year, you're not who you are; you're a long-dead historical figure, a powerful magic user, a pumpkin, a cat. A sexy pirate, or something. The point is, you're whatever you want to be, which can be immensely liberating for those who need liberation.

Halloween was important for me as a child because it gave me an opportunity to dress myself in flowy black clothes and wander the streets at night, which is, frankly, what I still do in my spare time. As a teenager, though, it turned into an opportunity to express the parts of me that I wouldn't otherwise be able to express without ridicule; painted nails, heavy makeup, and garish outfits served to delight fellow party-goers and free myself.

So, while I do think that Halloween is valid as a fun and campy romp filled with candy and (for some) far too much alcohol, I can't help but remember being a terrified seventeen-year-old in eyeshadow and lipstick, hastily applied in a public bathroom, walking into a houseparty and feeling empowered in a way that I never had before. To me, keeping Halloween alive means more than just hanging skeletons and carving pumpkins. It means giving every confused and repressed person an opportunity to be themselves, to be who they really are when they can be "someone else." (That, plus candy. Lots and lots of candy.)

It is with a wicked satisfaction that I have introduced you, dear readers, to the very first issue of *Rattle + Rictus*. Here's to many more.

BOO!

Cory Willingham

