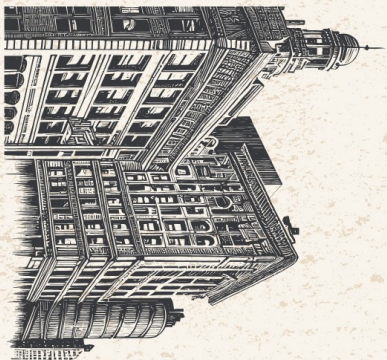




October 2025
Kansas City Public Library



OCTOBER 2025

KCPL PRESENTS
**PHANTOMS
OF THE
LIBRARY**
VOLUME II



**Welcome to
Phantoms of the Library 2025**
by Kevin Fink

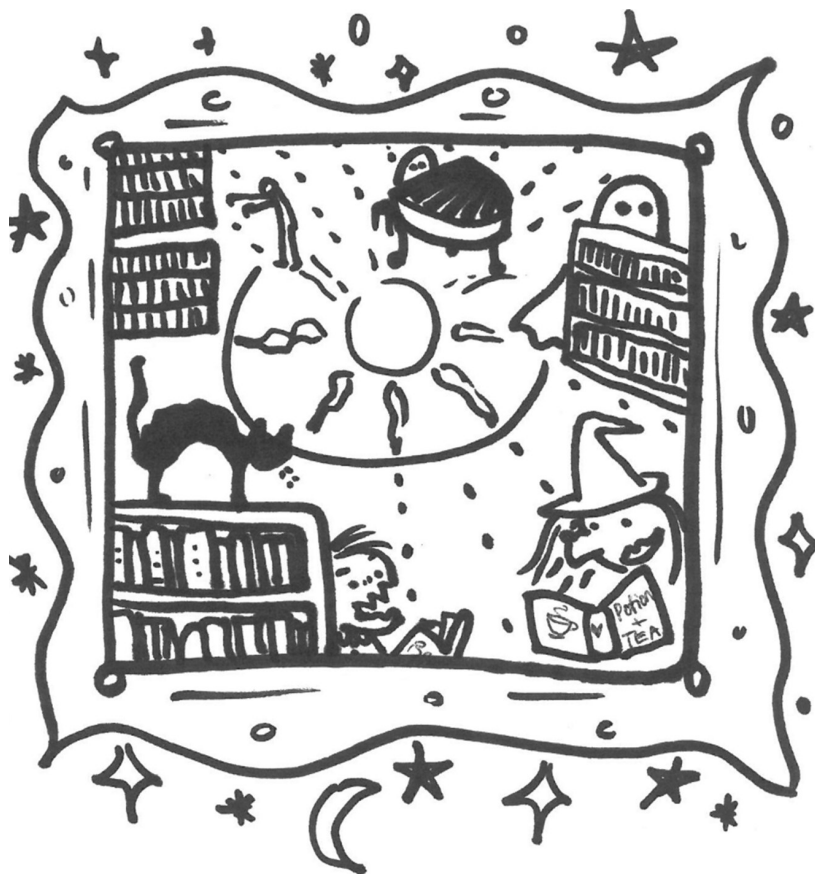
We hope you'll enjoy a story or ditty
about these phantoms of Kansas City
Reading these words, you'll experience thrills
You'll hide under the covers, get goosebumps from chills
A tale of a specter, a tale of a ghoul
a tale of a witch, a tale of a fool --
whatever the tale, terror will rule
So get your fright on
but keep the light on
For after reading each story
of grotesqueries so gory,
of monsters who creep,
of ghosts who wail and weep,
you won't (well, probably won't) ever want to go to sleep



KANSAS CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY

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Boo-ks Lovers

Poem and Illustrations
by Madeline Amend

‘Twas the night before Halloween
And all through KC,
Many creatures were stirring,
Some dead and diseased.
Zombies were emerging,
Behind bookshelves they’d hide~
To terrorize children and people inside...
The KC public library.
Oh no!
Oh dear!
The horrors! The monsters! Oh, why are they here?
To stop censorship, of course,
And they just love to read.
They like to haunt doorways,
The werewolves have fleas.
But most just want friendship on a chilly October.
Book lovers need books,
And also each other. ❤️



Room 1046

by Kevin Fink

You pass under the black and brass and bright lights of the hotel entrance on Baltimore Avenue. You walk through the lobby full of potted plants, run your fingers across the soft plush red and navy blue velvet seats as you pass them, lift your head to view the grand chandelier and cream columns supporting the mezzanine, the sound of your footsteps echoing as you cross the black-and-white tiled floor. You continue to walk slowly forward, your brain foggy and tired, until you reach the dark oak front desk and press your palm down on the bell. The sound of the bell echoes, piercing the silence in the lobby, the silence in your head. The desk clerk arrives but says nothing and before you can open your mouth to speak, she pulls a key from the wall and holds it out to you in her pale hand.

“Room 1046. Interior room. Courtyard view. Just what you asked for,” she says. You take it, staring at the brass key glinting in the dim, dusty, yellow light of the lobby. Confused, you begin to lift your heavy head to speak to the clerk, to ask why that key, why that room, but when you do, you find that she has gone, disappeared.

A bellhop appears, as pale as the desk clerk. “No bags, sir?” he asks, in a voice barely above a whisper. Where are your bags? Have they been lost? Did you ever have any bags? You can’t remember... But perhaps it doesn’t matter...

Up the gated elevator to the 10th floor, down an empty hallway lit by dim, flickering sconces. Low, hushed voices emanate from behind the closed doors of the rooms, too quiet for you to understand what they’re saying, but ever present, the buzz of whispered voices filling the space in your head until you reach your room, when the voices stop.

You’re suddenly in your room alone; you struggle to remember when or even if the bellhop unlocked the door for you but your memory is strange and failing you, it has been ever since you entered the hotel. On the desk are three items: Toothpaste, a hairbrush, and a comb. The items seem familiar but where did they come from, are they yours? When did you place them on the desk? You’re so tired...maybe it doesn’t matter...

You lie down on the bed, hoping to sink into the soft mattress and fall into a deep sleep. But sleep never comes. The room, the hallway, the hotel is full again of voices, this time closer, this time louder, this time laughing, right outside your door, that won’t allow you to sleep. You open the room door and walk out into the hall, hoping to confront the rude, loud guests, to ask them to stop, but the hall is empty, devoid of physical beings. But still full of voices...

Until a ding from the elevator arriving on the 10th floor silences all of them. Frozen, you watch from the other end of the hall. A pale, bony hand pushes the elevator gate to the side, revealing someone dressed in dark clothes, a rotted mink coat and a long string of pearls hanging on the frame of a woman so thin, so skeletal that you can almost see her bones through her skin. Slowly, she opens her mouth. And in a voice that you don’t hear in the hallway, an insidious, infecting voice that instead speaks from inside your body, inside your head, she says, “You. You are...for me.” Her mouth begins to curve up at the sides into a horrible, grotesque smile. You cannot move as she exits the elevator, slowly moving toward you, each sconce light flickering out as she passes, plunging the hallway into darkness. She reaches you, her

mouth frozen into a grim, horrifying smile, her withered hands caressing your face, clutching at your body, grabbing you to take...where? Down. Down down down...

You're able to finally break free and you begin to run, down the hallway, now black as night, toward the open elevator. You reach the elevator and take it down to the lobby, now full of people just like the woman; withered, skeletal, dressed in tattered tuxedos and suits and dresses, all smiling the same smile, all reaching out to clutch you, to grab you, to drag you down and consume you... But you're finally able to wrest yourself free from the ghouls and the violent, hideous specters. You're able to run through the lobby, through the doors and back out into the night, the street, the city. You close your eyes, breathe, and turn to walk...

You pass under the black and brass and bright lights of the hotel entrance on Baltimore Avenue. You walk through the lobby full of potted plants, run your fingers across the soft plush red and navy blue velvet seats as you pass them, lift your head to view the grand chandelier and cream columns supporting the mezzanine, the sound of your footsteps echoing as you cross the black-and-white tiled floor. For you are Artemus Ogletree. You died in room 1046 of the Hotel President. And now you can never leave.



The Bookworm by Ryan Reed

Annie Arnold loved books, and it broke her heart when they went missing.

"It belongs right here, and this is where the catalog says it should be," she said to herself and scanned the rows one more time.

She was looking for "Salem's Lot," by Stephen King. The patron who asked about the book had been hopeful but understanding. Annie had taken their number and pledged to find a copy for them one way or another. The days were getting shorter, and the leaves were starting to turn. Annie understood completely.

Nothing terrifies a librarian more than a missing book. Being a good librarian means knowing where to find things, but if those things are not where they are supposed to be, then the whole system starts to fall apart. Annie tried to think of possibilities. If it were checked out, it would be moving through the system from the return box to sorting then back to be shelved, but the catalog would know that. Instead, it said it should be right in front of Annie and there wasn't even a gap where it should have been.

The other option was the one that Annie feared the most. Sometimes books ended up on shelves where they shouldn't be, either placed there on accident or through the ill-fated good intention of patrons trying to save the overworked librarians some

time. When this happened and the book came to rest out of place, it could be a long, long time before it was found.

As she searched the shelves for the rogue book, she wove between people inch-worming their way across the spines. The sounds of patrons echoed off the marble of Kirk Hall over the chiming of a grandfather clock. Light poured in the large west-facing windows onto the tall Greek columns. Already people were starting to filter out the front door and the other librarians were finishing their work. The library would soon be closed, and Annie was empty-handed.

Annie Arnold loved books and through the transitive property, she loved the people who loved books. She knew what it was like to have that itch for something specific and she wanted the library to be the place where people came to get that itch scratched. She could stay a little late and see if Stephen King turned up. It wasn't the end of the world.

Annie woke startled by a sound she could not be sure hadn't originated in her dream. It had been a long and low moaning, almost like a cow but deeper and sadder. It still echoed, but she couldn't tell if it was in her ears or in her head.

She had fallen asleep at the circulation desk while waiting for the other branches to get back to her about her missing book. She had thought perhaps the book had accidentally been shelved at another location. If that was so, it would be easy to find. Annie desperately wanted to be able to call the patron and tell them that they could pick it up in the morning. This coming weekend was supposed to be lovely, and she could imagine the patron in Loose Park reading in the cool morning under the shade of the large oaks. But now it was dark, and all the lights were off save the cruel red glow of the emergency exit signs.

She heard the sound again.

This time it was nearer. The low mewing was closer and more wet; Annie could place a sharp clicking at the end of the call and

an abrasive scuff that hissed on the now-dark marble. On the other side of the hall, she saw the tops of the tall stacks and at the very end, the very last one of them swayed. The sound of books spilling from the shelves accompanied the movement.

Everything inside of Annie told her to leave. The library was empty. Everyone was gone and security had locked up when they left. But either she was still dreaming, or she was no longer alone in Kirk Hall. The mewing called again, followed by a chuffed coughing noise that sounded almost like laughter. Another stack swayed and spilled more books.

Picking her way across the endless open expanse between the pillars, stepping light and quick in her quiet sneakers, Annie dashed behind one of the shelves and peeked down the aisle between the windows and the stacks. The floor was littered with books splayed open like a flock of dead birds. As she moved closer, she could feel something just on the other side, something big.

When the sound echoed again, she felt the vibration from the floor into her chest.

Around the corner she saw the creature.

It was as big as two couches lined up. The light from outside glistened on its dead-grey wet skin between a patchwork of dry callouses where long hairs sprouted and stood as if sniffing the air. As it propelled itself forward, an ovular opening expanded on the front end to engulf the pile of books in front of it. Her mind tried to rationalize with her brain, to explain what it was that she was seeing, but instead her knees felt weak and her feet were like lead.

The creature moved like an inchworm and as it arched its body forward the shapes of the consumed books showed through its wet skin in strange geometric outlines like a Picasso painting. In the illuminated cones shining through from the electric street-lights outside, it left a trail of exuded tomes as it slowly moved

from cookbooks to travel guides. One of the expelled books lay open with its spine broken and Annie immediately noticed that its pages were blank.

She crouched and silently flipped open another of the books, horrified to find its pages empty and white as well.

“Oh no,” she breathed out loud.

With a ratcheting wheeze, the creature turned and the two of them stared at each other for a breath before it lunged towards her and the books she held clutched to her chest. As she darted onto the marble in the middle of the hall, she tossed the books in the opposite direction, back towards the circulation desk. The creature went for the books and seemed to ignore her for the moment. Annie Arnold paused, consumed with both terror and a wild idea.

As the creature ate the thrown books, she started to grab as many titles as she could hold with a shameful feeling in her stomach. As she picked books to offer the beast, books that she herself wouldn’t mind losing to whatever word-consuming digestion took place inside the monster’s bulk, she felt sorry for the people who might miss them. It was a price that she had to pay.

With her arms almost too full to manage, she started to throw books – spacing them out in a loose line towards the stairs down to the AV department. The beast took the bait and pulled itself along from book to book. But as she reached the top of the stairs she noticed by the customer holds shelf, closer to the monster than she dared to consider, an errant copy of “Salem’s Lot” sitting on the marble. She didn’t know if it had already been through, if it were as blank as the others inside, but there it lay.

With a heroic leap, Annie lunged towards the beast, spilling some of the stack she held, and kicked the Stephen King down the stairs. Without looking back she dashed into the stairwell, feeling the humid breath of the monster approaching rapidly behind her. Leaving a trail behind her, at the bottom of the stairs

she quickly dashed towards the Durwood Film Vault and threw the rest of the books inside. Then, stooping to grab “Salem’s Lot,” she ducked behind the massive steel vault door and waited.

The Central Library had been a bank for most of its existence. It wasn’t until 2004 that the building reopened as a public library. Here, in the basement, the thick steel vault remained, and if she could lure the monster inside, then she could trap it there and protect the rest of the books from its ravenous hunger. With a series of wet slaps, she heard it half-falling, half-pulling itself down the steps until it contacted the carpet.

Then, everything was silent.

Annie held her breath and could see the beast there in her mind, sniffing around, curious but cautious; those long hairs tasting the air for her. She wanted to look but she was afraid it would notice her and her plan would be ruined. After what felt like an eternity, she heard it start to consume the first in the trail of books. Quietly, she let her breath out bit by bit until finally she heard those bulbous callouses rasping over the metal threshold of the vault.

Putting her foot against the wall and her back to the vault door, she pushed with all her might, surprised at how easy it moved. As she almost stumbled forward, Annie closed the vault and turned the wheel to lock it. Finally, she breathed out loud. Her legs turned to jelly and she could actually hear her heart trying to escape her chest. Sliding down the metal to the carpet floor, still marked with the trail of the monster, Annie held “Salem’s Lot” in her hands. She was almost too afraid to open it, too afraid that it had been wiped clean by the worm the same as all the other books that had lost their words.

As the muted mewling of the creature reverberated inside the steel vault, she opened the book with unsteady hands.

“Almost everyone thought the man and the boy were father and son,” read the first line.

After a few rings, the person on the other line picked up.

“Hello?” they asked.

“Hello, this is Annie calling from the Kansas City Public Library,” she said into the phone, her smile plainly audible in her words. “I just wanted to let you know that your copy of “Salem’s Lot” by Stephen King is available and ready for you to pick up. We open tomorrow at 9am.”

Weird things happened at the public library, she thought to herself. But somehow it always came through.



Little Dolls by Kathy Randolph and Hugo Ballard

My mom drove me to camp on the outskirts of Kansas City. I was going into my junior year of high school in the fall and summer camp was not something I was craving. The flyers for the camp had been around the house for a bit and clearly this was meant for *Troubled Teens* no matter how fancy they wanted to make it sound. As usual my mom didn’t want to listen to my promises to do better, help out around the place and find a part time summer job. Maybe she would listen if I got kicked out. No problem.

The camp was in a beautiful setting if you like water and landscaping, and nice buildings. Lots of activities were offered to keep us busy and engaged. The campers had counseling groups (of course that’s not what they were called) and lots of exercise. Great food, too! It wasn’t home. I wanted to be at home.

About a week into camp, everything started out as a normal day. There had been a few incidents in the days preceding but nothing (apparently) that got a kid sent home. My cabin group went canoeing, ate lunch, and spent the afternoon learning to make lures for fly fishing. There was a campfire planned for after dinner. I was laying low and looking for a chance to cause some chaos.

The camp director gave new meaning to the term *droll*. He was as wide as he was tall and full of witty and ridiculous

humor. He knew me by name and was always friendly and kind to me. I sensed that I frustrated him with my lack of progress, but he hadn't given up on me. At the campfire he went over the activities so far and what was planned for the future. He told a few jokes and proceeded to tell us there would be a true campfire saga told that evening. He proceeded with the story:

"Here is a story about a camp creature called the Wana-bea." said our camp counselor. "They say it lurks in the dark parts of the woods eating unsuspecting campers. They also say it fears the light of the sun, so it stays in a cave during the day....."

"I don't think that thing could beat me" said Dave who is always bragging about himself. "Shut your pie hole," said Sallie. I didn't care if Dave boasted. I understand that sometimes words are all we have.

"Now you guys should take a walk before you shower and head to bed," said our counselor when his "creepy" story ended.

So, I'll bet you guys think this is the part where we head off on a walk and one of us goes missing and everyone is creeped out and that's the end. Sorry, it isn't. Save your excitement for later.

Sallie and Dave headed off toward the path, so I tagged along. We took a walk and went to bed.

In the morning, we had arts and crafts. We all made trees since they were the easiest thing our art leader suggested. We had lunch and then we went to the lake to swim. Dave challenged each of us to a race, but everyone declined. We didn't need to give him one more thing to brag about.

I dove into the water and went deep. My eyes were stinging but I thought I saw something floating near the bottom of the lake. I kept diving and diving, not willing to give up on finding what was there. The burning in my lungs was becoming more and more unbearable. My vision swam shades of grey, yellow,

and red, and I felt myself sinking, sinking. All I wanted was to get some air. All my past mistakes and my rotten attitude came roaring to mind.... and yet, I wanted to live. With a final herculean effort, I flailed around with my arms and legs and unbelievably came to the surface of the water. As I flopped on the shore and gasped for a breath, I felt something hooked onto my shirt. I saw it was a weird doll. I grabbed it. The thing looked like the head had been ripped off and sewn back on.

"Hey guys look at this," I wheezed as my friends came over to check on me. "Look at this. It looks weird." "It's just a doll; there is nothing weird about dolls" Sallie said. (Someone always has to be snarky.) "I guess," I said, and tossed it back into the lake.

Needless to say, I stuck close to the campground and the cabin for a few days after my near drowning. I had some thinking to do and the weather was perfect for long walks.

As the week came to a close, I decided to go on a hike with Sallie and Dave. As we rounded a corner about a mile into the hike, we noticed a deserted toy factory we hadn't seen before. It looked like a great place to explore. "This place is cool" Sallie said. I silently agreed. As we moved closer to the boarded-up buildings, we noticed dolls here and there. Their big round glass eyes were staring at us as if they had secrets.

As we got closer there were overhanging trees and it seemed to get darker. I said "Isn't this kind of creepy? I think we should go back." "Not me" said Dave, no dumb doll is gonna scare me. You a chicken?" I waited a second for Sallie to back me up but there was no response. I said, "Sallie what do you think?" I turned and looked but she wasn't there! Dave noticed her absence at the same time. "This is not funny." said Dave. We started to back track to look for her.

As we kept going, we noticed a doll that had not been on the ground when we came in. I picked it up and noticed that it looked

a tiny bit like Sallie. Not believing it, I said, “Doesn’t this look like Sallie”? I looked over and no one was there. “Alright this is *still* not funny!” I yelled. “You guys quit messing around.”

I turned to go back but before I could run, I noticed movement in the corner. To my disbelief, I saw two little dolls. One looked exactly like Dave. The other one got up and its mouth started to move. “I think it’s your turn,” it said in a high-pitched voice. Then, as it made its way toward me, I noticed it was carrying a pair of very sharp knitting needles....

Epilogue



Clearly this story was not written by Mark. He was the victim of a long-time curse that had been placed on the toy factory. He wasn’t able to get home that summer and make all his promises come true or straighten out the problems he had caused in the past. RIP Mark.



The Queen of the Underworld and the Diamond King by Lynne Scott

I killed Joseph Morino. The jury was right. I did it. I killed him at the Touraine Apartment Hotel on Central Avenue in Kansas City, Missouri on May 24, 1918.

I am Mattie Howard. In my heyday, I was Kansas City’s *Queen of the Underworld*, the most infamous female gangster in KC history.

My trial for murder began in late 1920. My defense attorney was Jesse James, Jr., the son and namesake of *the* Jesse James of outlaw fame. Despite Jesse’s efforts and my claims of innocence, an all-male jury found me guilty of second-degree murder. I was sentenced to 12 years in the penitentiary. It was the verdict that caught the attention of the late Joseph Morino. Mr. Morino, I believe, expected me to be hanged by the neck until dead, as did his aggrieved widow.

Following my conviction, I was transported to the Missouri State Penitentiary in Jefferson City. There I became Convict 24265. Joe’s angry spirit visited my cell that very first night. He talked to me quietly, describing what my life was going to be like with him in it. I was terrified. I told the guards about my nighttime visitor, but they didn’t believe me. They said I was just

suffering first night jitters—I'd get used to things, and the sooner the better.

But I didn't get used to things.

Joe visited me every night for months. He terrified me. He robbed me of my sleep. I became pale and drawn. Sometimes he looked like he did when he was alive—a short, ridiculous, lump of a man. Other times he appeared as he had after I hit him over and over with a mean little blackjack I kept for protection—his face broken and bloody. But he always carried a rope with a noose at its end draped loosely around his own neck. It was a jarring reminder of his desire for my execution. I begged the guards to summon a priest, but they only laughed at me.

I suffered this way for months. I was exhausted, pale, barely able to eat. My beautiful golden hair lost its sheen. My blue eyes were sunken and bloodshot. I was beside myself with fear and anxiety. I spoke to my tormentor nightly trying to negotiate a treaty. He sniggered and leered at me with dead eyes. Everyone who heard me thought I was mad.

I spent most of my time lying on my cot, sleeping when I could, staring at the concrete wall when I couldn't. I sometimes skipped meals, too exhausted to lift a spoon to my mouth. The only comfort I had was that I was not alone. My cellmates were my talisman against Joseph Morino's ultimate goal for me. One way or another, he wanted me dead.

It must have been late 1922 when he started hurting me. I remember it was cold and gloomy. Living conditions were appalling and we all suffered from the chill of falling temperatures. The first night he grabbed my shoulders and raked his nails down my arms, leaving long, angry welts. I was hysterical and woke the cell block with my screams. All around me women cursed and shouted at me to shut up. The guards rushed to my cell, their huge flashlights pointed at me. They ordered me to knock off the screaming or, they promised, they would give me something to

scream about. Joe Morino took it all in from his hiding place in the corner of my cell. He appeared pleased with his handiwork.

Alone in the dark, I explored the welts with my fingers. Now they would have to believe me! Now there was proof of my torment. For the first time since entering the penitentiary I looked forward to morning. I would show them what had been done by a madman they could not see and did not believe in. I could prove he was real and I was in grave danger. I waited impatiently for the 5:00 a.m. alarm that catapulted us from our cots and onto our feet each morning.

My welts were faded by the time I got a guard's attention. She told me to stop scratching myself—it wouldn't make the itch go away, it was the lice. There was nothing I could say to make her understand I had not inflicted these marks on myself. I forced myself to swallow a bowl of cold oatmeal and retreated to my cot to brood.

From that point forward, Joseph Morino came to my cell nightly. Some nights he whispered obscenities in my ear. Other nights he pinched and scratched my arms and legs until my skin was bruised and broken. He raked his nails across my face and down my neck. He bit my hands and forearms. He put his hands around my neck and tightened them like a noose. He wouldn't stop until I coughed and gagged. Some nights I could not help but scream.

Eventually my cellmates complained to the warden. They said they were afraid of me, afraid I would hurt them. The warden agreed and I was alone from that point forward. Joe was pleased by my isolation and increased his torture.

Over the years they tried to prove I was injuring myself. When they taped heavy woolen mittens on my hands, Morino bit me. When they strapped me to my cot, he stood at my feet sneering. I taunted him, trying to provoke him into injuring me, but he would not be goaded. They dismissed my pleas to my tormentor

as deranged babbling and believed they had proven I was the perpetrator of my own injuries.

During my incarceration, a Kansas City Star reporter wrote that a study had proven female inmates in the penal system were 12 times more problematic to deal with than males. He went on to claim that of all the prisoners in the women's cell block in Jefferson City, Missouri, "Mattie Howard ... is by far the most difficult to manage." He said he had it on good authority that even other inmates refused to share a cell with me. With press like that, it was easy for the warden to get rid of me.

I was diagnosed with dementia praecox, a fancy name for stone cold crazy, and sent to the State Hospital for the Criminally Insane. The deplorable conditions drove even the most stalwart inmate insane and I believe I descended into true madness there.

At first, they tried straitjacketing me. But that took more effort than the orderlies were willing to expend on me. Before long, they left me alone and my night terrors simply became part of the nightly bedlam—just one of dozens of women howling in anguish.

My ill-fated relationship with Joe Morino started in 1917 when Albert Pagel, the only man I've ever loved, was convicted of aggravated bank robbery and sentenced to twenty years in the penitentiary. Al took care of me like a pretty girl should be taken care of. He supported me in high style. I was destitute without Al. And lonely, too.

I had already moved down twice from the luxury apartment Al and I shared. I was renting a single room on 9th Street from a religious fanatic who expected me to be in my room with cold cream on my face by 7:00 p.m. every night. When I missed her curfew, which happened often, she threatened to put me out on the street. The flop house was only one move away. I needed money. Bad.

Joe Morino, the man the law called *my* victim, was a diamond broker. In some circles they called him the Diamond King. He liked that. He owned a pawn shop at 8th and Grand, next door to the Victor Café where I often took my meals. I passed the time gossiping with Mr. Morino and his clerk when Al was out of town on business. I bought myself trinkets—a ring, a watch, a lovely little brooch—when business was good.

That's how Joe became overly fond of me. He commented too often on my big blue eyes, my blonde hair or a snug fitting blouse. He never took it any further. He knew I was Al's girl, and Joe himself had a missus. He was afraid of crossing either one of them. Still, a girl knows when she's making that kind of impression on a man.

It all changed when Al was locked up and I was facing life on the street. When I stopped at the shop one afternoon Joe told me his wife was out of town. He offered me a grand sum of money to spend three days and nights with him at the Touraine Hotel. I knew it wasn't right. I knew it was degrading. I thought Al would be disappointed if he ever found out. And Joe's missus would suffer a serious blow up, maybe at me. But I couldn't refuse—I was broke and I was desperate.

So, on the morning of May 22, 1918, Joseph Morino and I walked into a room at the Touraine with a nice little kitchenette and a pleasant view from the front window. Unfortunately for both of us, I was the only one who walked out. What happened during those three days and nights isn't important. What you need to know is that when they were over, Joe Morino reneged. He refused to give me any money at all.

I was beyond furious. My time and attentions were not free. At 24 years old I was 5 feet, 10 inches tall, 155 pounds and exceptionally fit. Joe was 55 years old and 5 feet 4 inches tall in his elevated shoes. He weighed more than 200 pounds and was soft from working behind the shop counter. I gave him an opportunity to change his mind and keep our deal, but he wouldn't.

Finally, push came to shove. Joe ended up dead on the floor and I became the owner of the flashy diamond jewelry he always wore. It was just like they said in court, even though I denied any involvement with Joseph Morino, alive or dead, and they never found the jewelry.

I was released from the State Hospital after serving six-and-one-half years of my twelve-year sentence. I was utterly broken and gravely ill. Albert had died in prison, so I expected to live with my mother while I regained my health. But at the end of the first week she told me my night terrors and what she called my “self-mutilation” frightened her. She was turning me out. She gave me a little money and I went to Chicago to see if there was anything there for me. I was able to support myself as a driver specializing in last-minute getaways. So, Joe and I wandered around Chicago for a couple of years, bound by the shackles of abject hatred.

Finally, in 1932 my life was transformed by a chance encounter. During a trip to Oklahoma City, I bumped into a travelling preacher who saw I was deeply troubled. He invited me to that night’s tent revival. I didn’t hold much stock in religion, and I don’t know why I went. But, when I arrived, I was shocked to realize Joseph Morino was not with me.

I was converted instantly and embraced a new calling as an itinerant evangelist that very night. I’ve traveled the country ever since telling an abridged version of my bad-girl-turned-good story. I’ve made a name and a modest living for myself. I don’t know what happened to Joe Morino. I haven’t seen him since Oklahoma City.

I’ll see my 90th birthday in a few days and I’m very, very tired. I still travel the country telling my story and praising God who, truth be told, never did much for me that I could see.

I eluded Joe Morino for more than 50 years, but I cannot escape my own mortality. Death has entered my room. His hands

are around my neck and his fingers are constricting—like a slowly tightening noose. I often wonder if Joe is waiting for me. Does he still carry his hanging rope? Or has his anger burned out over time?

Sometimes I think I hear him calling my name from somewhere nearby. I will have the answers to my questions soon enough.

Notes



Mattie Howard (nee Martha Alice Howard), Joseph Morino, Albert Pagel and Jesse James, Jr. were real Kansas Citians. Mattie dated Albert, murdered Joe, and was defended at her murder trial by Jesse James, Jr. Some time after her release from prison, Mattie became an itinerant evangelist. She died in 1984, days short of her 90th birthday.

Mattie Howard image: www.squarespace-cdn.com

[The Girl with the Agate Eyes](#) by Dan Kelly, Copyright 2023

[The Pathway of Mattie Howard, To and From Prison](#) by M. Harris and Martha Alice Howard, Copyright 1937

Missouri Valley Special Collections, Kansas City Public Library, www.history.org



The Cookbook

by Ghost Lee Ghoul

“Maude,” Ed brayed. “Have you lost your mind? My boss and his wife will be here in an hour and the house is a mess. You need to clean this place up right now!”

Maude glanced up at her husband, then went back to the small green book in front of her. Her lips moved as she read. She threw a pinch of this and a dab of that in a bowl, then checked the book one more time as she stirred.

“Maude, I just spoke to you,” he howled. “Did you hear me? I said Charles and Anne will be here soon and you have to clean up this mess.”

Maude did not move.

“Now, Maude,” he snapped. “Right now!”

Ed watched his wife in disbelief. She did not do as he told her. She did not seem to even know he was in the room. She just read that book and mixed and stirred.

“Is that the cookbook your mother gave you? Lord knows what those recipes are like!” Ed rolled his eyes. “What have you made to eat? Not fish, I hope. You know I hate fish, and so does Charles.” He looked in the bowl. The stuff looked strange and smelled odd. “What is that stuff?”

“Ear of bat and tongue of frog, eye of fish and hair of dog,”

Maude said in a small, calm voice.

“You *have* lost your mind! I knew it ... a nut case just like your mother. My father told me not to get hooked up with you.”

“Give me that!” He snarled as he grabbed the bowl from her. The spoon flew out of her hand and drew a long, gray smear on the floor as it slid to a stop in front of the stove.

“What the heck is this stuff?” Ed sniffed. He swiped a finger through the gray glop, then stuck it in his mouth.

Maude closed her eyes and breathed, “Poof!”

She peeked, but Ed was still there. He stared at her. His eyes were wide. He looked scared. Or sick. Or both. He whimpered.

Maude closed her eyes one more time, raised her voice, and yelled, “POOF!” This time she heard the bowl crash to the floor and when she looked, Ed was gone.

“Ed?” She called in her small voice. “Ed, where are you?” She searched the house for the next half hour, but there was no trace of Ed.

At the sound of the first knock, Maude flew to the door. Anne was on the porch.

“Anne, where is Charles?” Maude exclaimed.

“Charles is gone,” Anne replied.

“Ed is gone, too,” Maude said.

“All gone,” said Anne. “And Ed?”

“All gone,” said Maude. “I’ve checked the house high and low.”

“Me, too,” said Anne as she pulled a small green book from her purse.

Maude and Anne smiled. They hugged. They laughed. They jumped up and down.

When they caught their breath, Anne said, ‘Let’s go out to eat. Where would you like to go?’

“Let’s do fish and chips,” Maude called over her shoulder as she went to get her coat and purse.

THE END *Beginning* ☺



*For Elija ...
Thanks for the bull, and
for putting up with mine.*

Hereford, Thereford and Everywhereford by Shelby L. Weathers

It was well into hour 43 when George took an honest assessment of his circumstances while driving the lowboy trailer truck, accepting that his body had abandoned the very concept of temperature regulation altogether. Fresh sweat soaked the collar of his shirt, tickling the hair on the back of his cold neck. Betty’d warned him that he’d regret not letting her shave it, something about him taking on the allure of a rabid wild man of some sorts, about her not finding that particularly attractive. George retorted that there was a certain rugged manliness to the upward sprawl of his back hair. He also thought it’d provide some color to his neck, helping to negate his usual lethargic predisposition in what was now a helplessly dreary autumn.

Nevertheless, he was certain that reporters would love writing about just how rugged and manly he would look as he’d ride into Kansas City with his cattle in tow.

There’d been little competition to drive the plastic bull from New Jersey to the American Hereford Association’s new headquarters in Kansas City, where the bull statue would sit upon a pylon 104 feet in the sky. People were already complaining about the bull being an eyesore, kitschy. Even Betty’d warned him to not let transporting the bull become his legacy, to not let this trip haunt him.

Albeit it was well into hour 43 when George also accepted that he could no longer ignore his desperate need for a doctor or priest.

There'd been a pothole west of Pittsburgh that tossed George up off of his seat, and he'd yelped from the shock of being slammed back down by gravity's reins almost as swiftly as he'd defied them.

It was then that he heard a low grumble.

He lifted his foot from the gas, pausing his trek to listen, to see if he was imagining it. Maybe a storm was coming, or something was off with the brakes. A potent silence followed, stark nothingness, like a candle snuffed at the witching hour.

Then the low growl resumed, only to erupt into a howl. Every hair that'd evaded Betty's clippers leapt, the follicles themselves trying to flee his neck.

It was then, George realized, that the sound was behind him, atop the lowboy trailer.



It was over a late Tuesday night dinner that Chip choked on a stray, burnt onion ring that'd traipsed into the crinkle cut fries that now sat soggy on his plate at a diner in a neighboring town to that of his and Jack's home of North Bergen, New Jersey. Jack shushed him, but Chip had already started reckoning with what he'd presumed would be an early, but overall respectable, death.

See, Chip was secretary of what had become a thriving business with his brother, Jack. He was living — or, rather, had *lived* — the American dream. Maybe onion rings were an American staple, or maybe they were as American as baseball or apple pie. He wondered when it was that onions became American: the moment they were battered, or breaded, or fried. Maybe it was the American dream that was killing him, like his mother had

feared. Chip's mother always hated his father for moving her out of Sicily.

And Chip loved his mother.

But Chip's father only loved Jack, and it was Jack's gritted scolding to get a grip that drug Chip out of the grave's clutches. Jack shoved a glass of water at him, and Chip instinctually started to glug it down but not without nearly chipping a tooth.

It would take another 25 years and a cancer diagnosis for Chip to be so introspective about death again.

Jack didn't care enough to address Chip's flirtation with the reaper, about Chip's cheeks slowly returning to ruddy pink from asphyxiation blue, because he was preoccupied with worry that the bull they built had started to bellow between Pennsylvania and Ohio.



Kansas Citians had worked themselves all up into a tizzy about which direction the bull would face. So what if they got the rear? In Calvin's opinion, it was an indisputable fact that seeing any part of that incandescent, magnificent beast would be a blessing.

This was Calvin's mindset when he met Jack at the warehouse.

Calvin suffered from psoriasis, thus he always wore gloves and had a shiny bald head. Calvin would only address the gloves he sported when prompted, using them as a segue to tangent about every miniscule detail of his condition. His nails disintegrating had been one of the best things to happen for his art, he claimed. The gloves provided a new level of control, to score and smooth the intricate, intimate details of his subjects' bodies.

The bull had been the most demanding.

As Calvin balded, it'd become less time consuming to apply

his scalp serums and more convenient to peel off his psoriasis patches. They reminded him of flower petals. When he shared this detail with a new audience, he'd stare off into the distance before asking if anyone would like a cup of tea. They'd picture a flake of skin floating in a teacup, like chamomile.

No one had taken him up on his offer. It was polite of him to ask, though.

Calvin was nothing if not chivalrous.

Every time he heard this story Jack feigned enthusiasm. In Jack's opinion, Calvin was an annoying, hyperbolic eccentric. He often thought about strangling him.

Calvin did a giddy little jump when he saw the completed bull in the warehouse.

"Isn't he just *glorious!*" Calvin exclaimed to Jack, jogging bow leggedly to the bull's rear. It took the full span of his arms to adequately pet its neglected rump.

In Calvin's opinion, Jack could have been a serial killer. Jack was average, with fine suits which were only that — *fine*. Nothing special. He wasn't necessarily good looking, and he had the charisma of an accountant who would shrug and say, "A little bit of everything," when asked what his favorite kind of music was. There was no sparkle to him, no pizzazz, and this convinced Calvin that the only explanation for Jack's business success had to come from killing people. Calvin liked to laugh about this from time to time, an inside joke between him and himself.

As he pet the bull, Calvin noticed a smudge on the plastic fur, likely dirt from a technician working at odd angles. Dropping to his knees, Calvin crawled over, licked the pad of his gloved thumb, and began to rub the discoloration away.

The darkness began to blossom. Calvin thought this was beautiful, warm, like falling asleep. But his precious beast began to fade as his vision blurred, and it was only in resistance to this

separation from his sculpture that Calvin realized he was losing consciousness.



The bellowing bull haunted George.

It drove him to hash things out with God, to revisit what his grandfather had told him about death, to think about ghosts.

While there are various shades of it and they are all still best described as brown, his mother's eyes were warmer than the color allotted for. The dirt he'd seen coated beside them that day, when her eyes were open and glossy, was dull and dark. He hated that he had to call her eyes brown, like that dirt.

George was grateful to look like his father, to not see her in the mirror.

He hated seeing his grandfather at his mother's funeral, hated seeing her eyes tell him that she was somewhere else, somewhere he couldn't go, and that she wasn't coming back. He hated that her eyes could still be there, looking at him through someone else.

As soon as George could visualize his grandfather's wrinkles, could remember the exact shade of his eyes, like his mother's, the bull on the trailer screamed.

George woke suddenly, behind the wheel, bustling down the road. He'd closed his eyes, but he couldn't remember when.



During the first noon that he spent interwoven in the plastic bull's innards, Calvin accepted that he was going to die. The real crime, though, was that in trying to kill him, Jack had proven that Calvin was clairvoyant and should have used that to make money. At the very least, Calvin could have made better life decisions, like not giving Jack a chance to wallop him in the back of the head with a spare piece of steel before jailing him inside of his

own creation as it traveled from New Jersey to Kansas City.



Betty told George to haul the bull. She thought it would be healing. They couldn't afford a psychiatrist; they saved, sure, but those funds went to cavities or caulking the tub. It was an accident, what happened to his mother. How often did he cross paths with bulls, yet how often were his nightmares?

At least this way he'd get paid to conquer his fears, and maybe she could get some sleep.



During the third noon inside the bull Calvin noticed that his skin was beginning to blister. This was also when he realized that for all his life he'd been living a lie. He combed through all of the religions and philosophies as if they were compiled into a mental rolodex and tried to remember which one promised another go at the whole living thing.

He'd been annoying. The gloves, the constantly-lathered scalp, he knew he was overwhelming. This was intentional. See, in school he wouldn't study for tests in order to avoid the shock of failure. He hadn't studied; of course he would do poorly. He positioned himself in a constant state of premature surrender, because it guaranteed disappointment rather than uncertainty. If Calvin was annoying on purpose, he couldn't be surprised by rejection. He couldn't be shocked to find himself alone.

He laughed to himself, aware the tubing within the bull was creating some really peculiar howling sounds as he cried, and considered maybe he was responsible for his own imprisonment. He'd annoyed Jack. Maybe that was why Jack targeted him.

In crafting failure, he had failed himself.

In crafting this feat of meat, he had cooked himself.

It was all so silly.

He would be far braver, more forthright, if this wasn't the end. He longed for those he loved, knowing he would never have an answer — did they love him too?

Without knowing, could he say that he had lived?

Afterall, what was living without loving?



It was raining when George rode into Kansas City with his cattle in tow. Reporters rejoiced, but none described George as "rugged" or "manly." Instead, the papers called him "lanky."



If his father was still alive, Jack would be dead.

But since his father was gone, Jack unlocked the bomb bay type doors, and Calvin poured out.

There's a reason why Jack did it to Calvin — Jack couldn't do it to himself. What they had created, the bull, was an abomination. It was a disgrace to Kansas City, to his family name, to the Heavens above. Someone who could create such a monstrosity could not walk amongst the living.

Jack was expected at the ceremony; he had a wife and kids.

Calvin had no one. But he would wake. And if anyone could talk, it was Calvin.

Luckily, Calvin was frail, so Jack hoisted him into the car, then parked along a nearby bluff.



Right on schedule, Jo was in the checkout line. Will didn't turn around when Jo paid. He kept looking out the big glass windows at the street. Jo carried her bag over, and while she couldn't remember how feet were supposed to be arranged when standing next to someone, she settled into what she hoped looked like a normal stance at Will's side.

“Whatcha lookin’ at?” she asked, glancing at him, hoping to catch his eye. They were fourteen, so catching his eye meant looking slightly down; he wouldn’t be taller than her for four more years, and even then, it’d only be three or so inches. She would think about this often.

Will shrugged. “Regular hasn’t been here in a couple weeks.”

“You keep track of regulars?” Her cheeks warmed.

“I’m kind of scared that he died.”

“Oh.”

“He’s a weird one. An artist. Always wears these bulky gardening gloves. He’s gross, kind of. Obnoxious. I don’t know. Can you care about someone even if you kind of hate them?”

They became neighbors at ten. Will had the freckles of a child’s drawing of an imaginary best friend, crooked teeth and all. His eyes looked like root beer barrels. Jo would play outside for hours, only to find out that he’d visited family out of town. She befriended his friends, learned his favorite foods and colors.

Every four days she’d destroy something. She’d drop eggs, squash bread, decide that she wanted some random fruit they didn’t have in the house. All of these were sold at the grocers, and what a coincidence — she would always need these things during Will’s shifts.

In years to come, Will would grow up, into friends Jo didn’t understand, into interests that confused her, and she would grow tired. They would move to different cities, have different careers, and then one day she would hear that he was getting married. She would cry so hard that she would throw up. She cried for herself at fourteen, who, after being asked if she could care about someone she kind of hated, she’d say, “Yes,” then crawl into bed and wonder if he’d understood she meant him.



It took a few weeks, but George told Betty about the bull screaming. This prompted her call to a psychiatrist. George finally cried over his mother, and discovered that he was colorblind.



It was well into hour 43 of his visit when Chip choked back a sob and climbed back into the lowboy trailer truck to head back to New Jersey.

The plastic Hereford in Kansas City had been inspired by a real bull: Hillcrest Larry IV from Hillcrest Farms in New Cumberland, West Virginia. He was 1,900 pounds, three years old, and sold at auction for \$70,500 — a record.

Thus, Larry was no longer at Hillcrest Farms. Thanks to the statue overlooking Kansas City, though, seeing his likeness was reasonable for most.

But Larry’s mother would never see her baby again.

And Chip loved his mother.

In the process of creating the statue, a quarter-sized replica was built. Everyone seemed to have forgotten about the smaller model in the haze of getting the final statue up on that midwestern pylon. No one noticed Chip hauling the little bull into his garage, either.

A month after the ceremony in Kansas City, Chip loaded the quarter-sized replica atop the lowboy trailer and made the trek from New Jersey to West Virginia. There they hoisted the model from the lowboy, and placed him in the field.

It was there that Larry’s mother took a moment to marvel at the plastic Hereford in utter jubilation.

To learn more about the Hereford Bull statue in Kansas City, please visit this link: <https://kchistory.org/blog/once-star-kansas-city-skyline-90-foot-cow-statue-now-sits-alone-park>



Missouri Valley Special
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Stine & McClure Undertaking Company

by Creep E. Phantom

They say the old mortuary building on Oak Street is haunted. That's actually not a farfetched notion considering hundreds—probably thousands—of Kansas Citians ended their earthly sojourns on a cold, hard slab in the basement of the Stine & McClure Undertaking Company. Certainly some of those passing through were reluctant to leave and may have lingered or refused to go altogether. But, in 1923 a pair of cadavers appeared at the mortuary most unexpectedly, and under the most unusual of circumstances. The event attracted national attention, became the death knell of Stine & McClure and, perhaps to this day plays itself over and over in that venerable old building.

On July 18, 1923, William McClure wrote a note that simply said *"I'm sorry"*, then laid himself out on one of the embalming tables in the basement of his undertaking company and drove a six-inch knife into his chest at the precise location of his heart. His last thought was not of his wife or children, as one might expect. William McClure marveled at the ease with which the fine blade pierced his flesh on its way to his heart. It is fair to assume a grateful man does not end his own life, but for that one small thing, William McClure has been eternally grateful.

Hours later Edward Stine returned from a banking errand and found his partner dead by his own hand with his own knife

on his own embalming table. Although he had seen countless corpses during his career, the shock of this one threatened to knock Mr. Stine off his feet. He staggered to the elevator, desperate to reach the upper floor and instruct his secretary to summon the police. It turned out Mr. Stine did not need to go upstairs to find his secretary. The elevator door was open and she, Eula Thompson, was lying at the bottom of the shaft. Like William McClure, she was dead. This time Edward Stine could not withstand the shock and he slumped heavily to the floor. He mumbled a little prayer, believing he, too, was not long for this world. Minutes later an employee found him there, unable to return to his feet. Together they composed themselves as best they could and called the authorities.

The incident was an instantaneous scandal. It was as if someone had thrown a lit match into a basket of shredded newsprint. In Kansas City, people talked of nothing else. There was endless speculation and innuendo. The case became national news, with newspapers shouting “Dual Deaths Puzzle KC Police” and proferring blatantly salacious theories about what may have led to the untimely and unusual deaths. The families of the deceased were buffeted and battered by lewd implications about their dearly departed. All this as they grieved their loss and battled their own unthinkable explanations for the deaths of their loved ones.

Ultimately, an inquest ruled Eula’s death accidental and William’s suicide the result of his shock over her demise. One did not need to wait long in 1923 boomtown Kansas City for other jaw dropping events to occur. The gossips and reporters hadn’t even finished dusting the titillating McClure-Thompson crumbs off their hands before there were new outrages to chase down. The Paris of the Plains was never short of crime and indecency. Even with media and public attention focused elsewhere, things were never the same for Stine & McClure Undertaking Company. The business limped along for a few years but never recovered from the unseemliness of the whole affair.

Stine & McClure closed in 1926. The building was sold to an ambitious young developer with a plan to turn it into a short-term boarding house. It seemed a safe bet given the huge influx of people into KC, the fastest growing city in the Midwest. During renovations there were occasional reports by workers that a man and woman could be heard arguing fiercely, when no one else was in the building. Many reported hearing a woman’s blood curdling scream. A plasterer walked off the job saying he had seen an apparition carrying a knife coming toward him in broad daylight and he refused to risk encountering the vision again. Still, no one was hurt and the complaints were attributed to bootleg hooch.

The new rooming house opened its doors in 1927. It was wildly popular with the cowboys and salesmen and bankers and bootleggers who flocked to KC hoping to make their fortunes. But soon lodgers began to report strange sounds throughout the building. A man and woman arguing violently. The thud of things falling to the floor. Heart-stopping screams. The sound of the elevator moving up and down incessantly between floors. And much more. The incidents were far more alarming to the bankers and salesmen than to the cowboys and bootleggers, and soon the building’s clientele changed. It became home to a rougher crowd. These were the men, and occasional women, who were accustomed to living day to day in a dangerous world. The establishment’s reputation suffered and the house declined.

Eventually, Prohibition was repealed. Bootleggers disappeared. Herds of cattle were driven by truck from Texas to the KC stockyards. Cowboys became scarce. There were still the working women, but most of them moved to quieter, more comfortable places in the city’s downtown. The rooming house closed. The building changed hands several times among optimistic businessmen. But the unnerving sounds and chilling unease continued regardless of the business operating within its walls. The initiatives failed one by one as the unexplained sounds grew louder and the atmosphere more ominous with each passing year.

The building was never again used as a mortuary and it has not been a residential establishment for many years. It is now an event space, hosting intermittent crowds, none of whom ever spend the night. The entities who dwell there seem to prefer it that way. They are frequently heard but seldom seen. It is generally assumed they are the spirits of Eula Thompson and William McClure. Of course, that may not be the whole story given the many souls that spent some of their final hours above ground laid out on a cold, marble slab in the basement of the Stine & McClure Undertaking Company.

Notes

This short fiction is based on the following facts: William McClure, age 54, and Eula Thompson, age 45, died as described on July 18, 1923, at Stine & McClure Undertaking Company on Oak Street in Kansas City, Missouri. Their deaths were fodder for national gossip and speculation. An inquest ruled Eula's death accidental and William's suicide the result of his shock over her death. I found no record of Mrs. McClure's opinion on the matter.

Source: Kansas City Hauntings History and Mystery of the Paris of the Plains, copyright 2020 by Becky Ray



Carrie & Me: A True Ghost Story

by Abbey Briscoe

It was neither shadow nor sound that alerted me to the obscure presence that surfaced in the library's archive but an intense, quiet knowing. As a new employee of the Missouri Valley Special Collections department, I was intrigued by the old leather bound books that were nestled away on the 5th floor where I worked. The first volume that spoke to me was called: "Mysteries of All Nations: Rise and Progress of Superstition, Laws Against and Trials of Witches...Together with Strange Customs, Fables and Tales." The title page had these unusual perforated dots at the top that spelled out the words "Public Library Kansas City MO." At the bottom was a small stamp that read "Exceptional." Over the next few weeks, I developed an intrinsic desire to know the purpose of these markings as they continued to show up over and over again in other texts. This was no coincidental discovery.

The weather was dismal in downtown Kansas City but inside the library, staff kept their spirits up as everyone prepared to celebrate our repository's 150th anniversary. Among the festivities planned was a fan fiction writing contest. Participants were invited to write a story about our first public librarian, Carrie Westlake Whitney, who served from 1881 to 1912. I enjoyed writing fiction but knew nothing about her.

A quick search on kchistory.org provided me with a short biography, and it was there that I learned of her legacy: Through-

out her thirty year career, she managed to increase the library's book collection from 1,000 to 100,000 volumes! This was well before anyone could order things off the internet. In the early days, Carrie took solo trips to bookshops in Chicago via train and horse drawn carriage, spending days browsing the store's selection before making her purchases. Though this feat was impressive, I've been told that many of these books have been lost to time; worn out copies from avid readers were replaced with new ones and out-of-date materials were weeded out. Still, I wondered if there could be a volume or two left that survived, tucked away behind the glass walls of the archive...

My vague interest in the librarian spiraled into a time consuming treasure hunt of sorts. The moment I searched for Carrie's name in the online newspaper databases, I uncovered dozens of articles describing her opinions, personal life, and daily work. By day three of my search, I needed a spreadsheet just to keep track of it all...and my sanity! Though the flow of information never seemed to end, I loved every second I got to witness a new piece of her story and had become fully committed to writing about it.

What drew me into Carrie's world was her ability to manage a public library in the 19th century despite the societal restrictions expected of her sex. It wasn't until 1886, five years after Carrie had been hired, that a man named Melvil Dewey, famous for the invention of the Dewey Decimal System, convinced other men that it would be a good idea to hire women as library workers. Though his motives were exploitative [women could be paid less than men], this opened the door for women to become successful leaders in the field. In a way, Carrie was a trailblazer; she helped cultivate the standards for librarianship in Missouri while also serving as a role model for women.

My obsession to know everything about Carrie had taken over, and I was losing sleep because of it. Within the first month, I had already uncovered her family tree, numerous tales of work-

ing at the library, and tidbits about the adventures she went on in the northern parts of the United States. On the night I stumbled upon her death certificate, I couldn't help but wonder where she might be buried. Her Find-a-Grave page said it was at Forrest Hill Cemetery right off Troost Avenue. It was close to my home and I had the following day off, so I made plans to go see her.

Gentle Spirit

Bundled up in my wool coat, I walked towards section 37 of Forest Hill Cemetery. The groundhog Punxsutawney Phil had predicted an early spring, but the barren trees and parched grass revealed that winter's frost hadn't receded yet. As I scanned the headstones looking for Carrie, an ominous buzzing sound disrupted my concentration. As it intensified, I closed my eyes and flung my hands about shouting, "Shoo fly! Get away from me!"

The noise stopped. I opened my eyes again and watched as tiny white puffs of condensation materialized from my lips. Then I pulled my hat closer to my face and picked up my pace. As I walked along the rows of Kansas Citians who were buried decades ago, I quietly pleaded with them not to send any more phantom flies. My coming here was amicable. But no matter how much I tried to console them or myself, my heart pounded faster and faster. I wanted to leave. As I took what would have been my final steps in the graveyard, I caught a glimpse of a simple square marker that read: CARRIE WESTLAKE WHITNEY DIED 1934.

Out of the overcast sky, a single sunbeam came down and wrapped its angelic light around me. My heart slowed down and I no longer felt the urge to run away. "Hello Carrie," I whispered, standing over the spot where her tiny skeleton lay. "Thank goodness I found you."

This wasn't my first encounter with the afterlife. In the spring of 2017, both my mother and best friend died a month apart. One succumbed to mental illness, and the other to cancer. Both

terrible diseases I wouldn't wish on anyone. The grief I felt from their passing was insurmountable, and my throat still tightens as the tears roll hot eight years later. What has helped me move through the pain is the comfort of knowing they're still here; I wasn't left to face my hardship alone.

Rainbows, butterflies, and other reminders of the loved ones I lost have been the balm to my sorrow. They're still connecting with me through strange, mystical pathways, like when my mom's and my special song plays on the radio whenever I'm feeling sad or the moments I see a K-State Wildcat emblem on the back of someone's car- an ode to my friend's and my love for our alma mater. I think it was my ability to pick up on these ordinary signs that cultivated my sixth sense, and without it, I would not have understood the events that were about to unfold.

In the upcoming days since I left Forest Hill, I paid more attention to what was inside the old leather bound books. Some of the pages had notes scribbled in the margins with no information as to who had written them. "Was this possibly Carrie's own hand?" I pondered.

Sitting under a glass display case that I passed each morning was an original letter written by Carrie. With something I could compare the notes to, I got to work examining her curly letter "c's", tall letter "t's" and long, loopy consonants. I was disappointed to find most of the writing wasn't hers at all. However, the handwriting from inside an 1897 art catalogue for the library were identical to the letter's. Between these notes, perforated labels and exceptional stamps, I was beginning to piece together the books that had once been part of the collection Carrie had built.

The Ultimate Discovery

It was summertime and my fanfiction story was on display next to the other contest winner's works down in Kirk Hall. Although I had completed my story months ago, I wasn't fin-

ished learning about Carrie Whitney and apparently, she wasn't finished communicating with me either. I was busy in the archive, pulling volumes in need of repair when I noticed a publication titled, "The Public Library Quarterly." I cracked it open and saw it had been written by none other than Carrie herself! After I finished skimming through it, I read the call number along the spine and froze. The copy in my hand had been shelved in the wrong place. It was supposed to be in the Q's, where we store our larger books. Even more extraordinary than this was after I searched for the publication in our catalog, I found out that the name of the author wasn't listed. The catalog simply read, "Publisher: Kansas City, MO: Board of Education." I may have been the first in a long time to know that these writings were tied to Carrie. That's when I knew that the obscure presence I felt in the stacks since my first week at the library had to be her.

Written with library patrons in mind for the years 1901-1910, the Public Library Quarterly educated readers on book selection, local history, and librarianship. Once I knew where the other copies were being kept, I took to reading all 38 of them. It was an incredible moment for me as this text was a firsthand account of the real Carrie Westlake Whitney. She was highly intelligent, whimsical, had a sharp sense of humor, and enjoyed learning about other cultures. She was also spiritual, a lover of Missouri history, a guardian of children, and a fantastic poet. In the Quarterly, she shared her vast knowledge of the world, and would often discuss conflicting ideologies on the same page with praise and optimism, such as Hallowe'en and Christianity.

The Quarterly also unraveled another mystery I had yet to solve. In the April 1901 issue, Carrie describes her exceptional book system. Out of print books or ones that were scarce received the "exceptional" stamp and were not allowed to leave the library. Children were also prohibited from handling the rare books. After 1912, the year Carrie's career ended, the use of the stamp appears to have ceased. This may suggest that the books I had

found were either chosen by Carrie or acquired during her tenure. As for the hole punch cut outs that spell out Public Library, this system was explained in an 1898 newspaper article. This measure was done to prevent book theft. Thieves would take the stolen library books to second hand booksellers and cash them for profit. After the library started “ruining” the cover pages with perforations, the booksellers were less likely to accept them and the number of missing books declined. In another article from 1904, Carrie once said of book stealers: “It is the opinion of nearly every employee of the library that the most frequent thief is the man, woman or child who is a faddist.”

Today

As I near the two year mark of my research on Carrie Whitney, I’ve decided to write her complete story with a due date of 2026 for the first draft. Though I’ve accumulated more information than I thought possible, I’m still not finished yet. Whenever I think I’ve neared the end of my treasure hunt, I discover another surprise.

Thanks to Carrie’s generous spirit, I’ve located two additional archival materials tied to her past: A 130-year old Public Library book mark that was tucked away in an 1893 annual school board report, and something more personal that I’m still pinching myself over: Inside of an 1897 library catalog I found scrap pieces of paper bound in between the printed pages. These scraps had book titles pasted on one side, and on the other was Carrie’s very own letterhead printed in 1900!

Since the first day I stepped foot in Forest Hill, I’ve visited Carrie’s grave three more times, and have introduced myself to her former library assistant and partner of over 40 years, Miss Fannie A. Bishop. I like to think the pair take turns pulling tricks on me in the stacks, like the time I was turning the crank to move our movable book shelves, and a little red book fell to the ground.

It was on the history of riverboats. And wouldn’t ya know, I was in the middle of researching them and found this gem to contain exactly what I was looking for.



Credit: American Library Association Archives

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Phantom Sightings & Notes



Cover art by Eden Faulds

Postcard: Missouri Valley Special Collections <https://kchistory.org/image/city-hall-jackson-county-courthouse>



Scattered bats and the letter E are
the art of Edward Gorey



E is for **Edward** who flew to a distant land
15 years ago and never came back.



KANSAS CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY