

Elda Oreto

**BRIGHT
NIGHTMARES**

~ Horror Stories ~

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

ISBN: 9798701485653

Imprint: Independently published

Copyright © 2021 Elda Oreto

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced or utilized in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

TO TOR HANNIBAL,
INDESCRIBABLE LIGHT

INTRODUCTION

The three short stories stem from my passion for horror literature.

In particular, they are inspired by the most famous classics of the gothic and dark fantasies: *The Haunted House* by Edgar Allan Poe, *Carmilla* by Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, *the Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* by Robert Louis Stevenson and *The Double* by Fyodor Dostoevsky.

These stories have always haunted me and in many ways shaped my love for writing and art.

At the same time, the Seminar X: *The Anxiety / Dread (L'Angoisse)*: 1962-1963: begins 14th November 1962 by Jacques Lacan has also strongly influenced the writing of short stories, and marked a turning point in my recent life. In particular the words Lacan spends on anguish, on the role of women as a subject of desire, on desire and the sexuality of a woman.

I would like to thank Alice Zucca for supporting and advising me, Dr. Silvia Borgonovo for helping me to disentangle myself from the tangle of my life, to my cousins Daria and Ilaria Grimaldi who are there even from afar and all those I met along the way until now and that, even if only for an instant, believed in me.

I would like to thank the people who will have the patience to read my stories, to share my deepest fears and desires, and therefore will become part of this little bewitched world for a while.

ELDA ORETO

1. The Apartment page 7
2. The Guest page 39
3. The Double page 93

1. The Apartment

Life forces us to make unexpected choices, to change perspectives, to adapt to the most inconvenient situations. Sometimes accepting reality means doing the most horrible things to ourselves and to those whom we love.

When I woke up that Saturday morning, I couldn't imagine that in just a few days, I was going to lose everything I loved the most: my husband, my apartment, my life.

My family and I were just moving into our new apartment. A tall hibiscus almost reached the windows of the first floor.

Teo, my husband, was moving things upstairs to our apartment on the second floor. Trudy, our nine-year-old dog, was tied up at the entrance, waiting for us, looking at the entrance to the building were all the things objects of our everyday life. The bookcase, my grandmother's painting, my mother-in-law's tureen—and, there was my grandfather's ancient gun, the one he said he had gotten on one of his adventurous journeys to Russia. But maybe he'd just bought it at some unknown antiques store. We didn't even know if it worked or if it had ever worked. It certainly had very little value.

Pieces of dismantled furniture, bags, luggage full of many different things and objects of all kinds were piled in the flower-filled courtyard. Displayed like this, scattered without any logic or order, the things looked like passengers in a train at a station, bewildered, tired, waiting for impossible coincidences, their only desire to have already arrived at their destination.

My family and I were starting fresh after a drastic but necessary life change. We were going to give up an important part of ourselves and move to a new place. I sometimes felt that making this decision was like plunging into a stormy ocean on a paper boat.

I moved our boxes continuously, from the crowded, sunny street into the courtyard. It was a hot and sunny summer day. Just standing made us sweat, so hot was the weather that day. Every once in a while, a warm wind would move the leaves of the trees. Everything was green and outrageously florid. The courtyard, which had looked so sad and gloomy in the autumn and winter, now seemed to have come back to life.

In the silence and the heat, we could hear crickets scraping their antennae like old broken bikes hidden in the grass. From the big chestnut tree white flowers fell, and in the small garden, g worried and anxious at the same time.

The 200-square-meter apartment, my family's new home, was in a huge building from 1800s located in an elegant old residential area of Naples. The building was one of the most opulent in the area. Located at the intersection of a main road and a secondary one, the building had a large façade with several balconies decorated with different symbols whose meanings I did not know.

We had found this apartment by a stroke of good fortune—or maybe it was destiny. The apartment had been unsold for a long time, for unknown reasons. We thought it was a good deal for us, and we bought it. Within a few weeks, we had done everything—completed the deal, signed the contract, asked for a loan and gotten the keys. It had all happened so fast that it almost hadn't seemed real.

Maybe the agency had really wanted to get rid of the apartment. The seller had never appeared. The agent told us he wanted to get rid of it as soon as possible.

Teo seemed a bit unsure about all these changes. We had come from a small town in Norway; he really liked living in a small town; relocating to a big city was quite a shock for him, and maybe also a little bit scary.

But I'd struggled in the small town, and Viggo, our two-year-old son, hadn't really been able to cope with life in the cold. I felt a sort of uneasiness about being in Norway. I

felt like a bison walking on a very thin sheet of cracked glass. From the outside, everything looked perfect, but things didn't fit right in Norway. Once we'd arrived in Naples, from the cold and dark North, everything would fall into place.

Now, it was time to arrange all the little things we'd collected in a lifetime of travelling. Now, all the objects that belonged to our previous life sat in a messy pile all around us. And everything felt strange and good at that moment, even though it would be an interminable task to put everything in its place.

All in all, we were happy to start a new life there.

My plan for the future was to dedicate myself to my family, to my apartment, to Viggo—and to finally to write my novel; that was my dream.

Besides my obvious excitement, I actually didn't really know what would happen in the future, and I was very scared. But I was keeping these feelings—and many others—to myself. My legs took me in a direction opposite to the one my brain ordered me to go.

The apartment kept me standing still.

People constantly went in and out of the building, a big one with two different sets of stairs. It seemed to us that thousands of people lived there. Every day, we saw new and different people.

People were curious, and they kept showing up to introduce themselves and to try to understand who we were.

Some of them complained mildly about the chaos, but we told ourselves not to pay too much attention to them. Just then, at the beginning, what was most important was settling down.

The apartment was on the second floor, using the stairs on the right. They had told us that another family was living next door to us. The entrance was a big, dark hall without windows.

The apartment had a peculiar layout, with many small quirks. The first of these was right at the front door, which was, in fact, a double entrance; the first door was armored and the second, in contrast, was a work of elaborate craftsmanship, made of colored glass and wood. The double door suggested a desire for extreme security on the part of the previous owner—almost as if he wanted to prevent the entry of strangers or thieves from the outside or to prevent someone or something from leaving.

In front of the double door hung a mask, left there by the previous owner. The mask was a big Asian totem, a sort of demon with a hungry expression. It was a red face with a crown of thousands of small skulls. We decided to keep it, since I liked scary objects.

Besides the scary mask and the double entrance, the apartment was a labyrinth of rooms.

The hallway was long and dark; from it, you could enter the main part of the flat in two ways. On the left was a room used as a closet and leading to Viggo's bedroom. At the opposite end of the hallway, there was a room with three doors. The first door on the left led to a small living room which, in turn, led to a studio that we decided to use as a guest room. The door in the middle led to the large main living room, a bright room with three balconies, where we would set up the TV, the library and a huge, long table we would use for lunch and dinner. The third door opened onto another hallway with access to a very small kitchen, a large bathroom on the right and a small, dark closet on the left.

The corridor made a circle that led back to Viggo's room. Next to it was our bedroom, with a little balcony that opened onto the back entrance.

The apartment looked warm and sunny at that moment, when everything was still very much a work in progress.

This would be our first night here, in our home. We were all very excited. At the end of the day, we closed the door behind us, and we were ready for our fabulous new start.

I couldn't have imagined that at such a bright moment, a huge shadow was hanging over my shoulder. In a matter of a few days, everything would be dreadfully different.

The morning after, on Sunday, the apartment was suffused with sunlight. I was cooking while Teo installed the TV and Trudy and Viggo played a special version of hide-and-seek as they explored our new home.

The heat of July had left us breathless, and it helped a bit to keep all the windows and balcony doors wide open. From the street, the noise of people, cars and voices rose joyfully.

While I was in the kitchen making breakfast, something extraordinary happened. A magpie came through the window and flew to the kitchen desk.

At first, I had my back to the window, so I didn't notice its presence. When I heard a sound, like the click of a tongue, I turned and saw the bird. It was stealing food from a bag of bread I had left on the desk. Its little head was stuck stubbornly in the bag. What impressed me the most was its long, black, silky tail, moving up and down, strange and graceful at the same time.

I took a towel and snapped it against the bird, which quickly took off quickly and prettily, spreading its wings—a cloak of white and black-chromed silk.

I ran into the other room to tell Teo and Viggo about the crazy experience I had just had. But to my great surprise, they weren't there. The room was empty. Something completely unnatural had filled the room. Everything was in its place, but at the same time, it wasn't.

"Carol!" I heard a voice behind me, and I turned. Teo was holding a half-naked Viggo. They had come from the bathroom, where Teo had been changing Viggo. "Carol, are you ok? You look so pale ..."

"I'm fine ... just a bit tired, maybe ... You know, a strange thing—a magpie ... came in. It seemed ... I don't know ..."

"A magpie? Are you sure? Here?" Teo clearly did not believe me, and he added, "You must be really tired ... and over-excited. Why don't you go take a nap with Viggo while I finish fixing breakfast?"

"That sounds like a good idea," I answered. It was true. I was tired and over-excited. I needed a little rest.

I took Viggo in my arms, and we went to our big bedroom. We lay down, and it was nice to hold him close, and hug him and caress him. The smell of his fresh skin was so comforting. Soon, we were both asleep.

I felt we had slept about half an hour.

The sound of a song on the alarm radio woke me up. It was a famous old song. I could remember the words:

*When I die and they lay me to rest
Gonna go to the place that's the best
When I lay me down to die
Goin' up to the spirit in the sky*

Being awakened so suddenly irritated me. I was very dizzy, and I felt even more tired than I had before. I switched off the radio, and when I turned, Viggo wasn't with me in bed anymore. I was alone in the room.

Anxiously, I started calling Viggo and looking for him in the room. He wasn't there. The windows were closed, so he couldn't be on the balcony. I checked under the bed and in the closet. He wasn't hiding there or playing. The door was closed, but I thought maybe he had managed to open it and go into the kitchen. So I went there and found Teo and Trudy, Teo cooking and Trudy begging for food. "Have you seen Viggo?"

"No. Wasn't he resting with you?" said Teo, stirring the food in the pan.

“Yes, but he’s not in the room anymore ... I think he somehow walked out. Have you seen him?”

“How could that be possible? He’s two years old ...”

“I mean, maybe he’s hiding somewhere in the apartment—in one of the other rooms ...”