

THE STORYTELLER'S PUBLICATION

A MONTHLY COLLECTION OF POETRY & SHORT STORIES

PIERCING THE VEIL

FEATURED AUTHORS

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A Note from the Editor

Thank you for reading our third issue of The Storyteller's Publication.

The Storyteller's Publication exists to connect and expand our minds and hearts through diverse stories and contrasting perspectives, revealing the greater tapestry of which we are a part. It also serves to break the cycle of consumption for our writers, and to invigorate the storytelling spirit. Each month is assigned a different theme. The theme of our second issue is "Piercing the Veil".

The theme "Piercing the Veil" was chosen as a way of encouraging our writers to think outside their normal sphere of existence. The pieces in this month's issue come from a variety of different perspectives, each trying to communicate both the current way of doing things and the way that is emerging. We are living in rapidly changing times, and while that can be scary, it is also worth taking account of the experience, so it can be shared with future generations.

You will encounter a diversity of perspectives in this publication. I hope they challenge you to ask yourself *why* they challenge you, and to see inside yourself.



Patrick A. Snitchler
Editor & Author

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The Hunchback

by

Patrick A. Snitchler

In Paris, in the cathedral that is called *Our Lady*, there was a hunchback who had left his normal quarters and had made his home in the cathedral's attic, or The Forest as it was called due to its tangle of wooden beams. There have been many legends told about this hunchback, and it is the point of this to tell the truth: he was not an outcast of a cruel society like some have conjectured, nor was he a hero.

This hunchback had entered this world a healthy boy, of dark hair, dark eyes, and strong form. He was the son of a privileged land-owning family, neither rich nor poor, neither privileged nor downcast. His father was slothful drunk, and abandoned his family when the boy was young.

He could control his shape when duty required, standing upright for short periods. Soon, however, his natural curvature would take over his body. It was painful for him to be in society with others who stood upright without effort, not only painful for his body, but also painful for his spirit, being alone in his pain as he was.

Doctors of the time found no source of this curvature, and they employed a Parisian inventor to create a brace for him. However, the brace brought questions about the boy's fitness for society, and his mother forced him to wear it no longer, but to hide his form well under clothes that draped just right over his increasingly horrid figure. She would beat him when the curve showed, and he determined that he would not show anyone his true figure.

Over the years, as he hid his form, bitterness turned to envy, and envy to lust, for the ease in which he could not have dwelt. Throughout his life, his disfigurement remained such that he could hide it when necessary, but only for a time, and then he would have periods of naturalness. As these periods of disfigure grew longer, he escaped more into The Forest. And it was in this time that our story begins.

There was an unmarried duchess who lived near Paris, with fair hair, green eyes, a slender form, and skin as white as porcelain. *Our Lady* was her favorite place of worship, and she returned to it time and again. It was here, at a late hour, that she was struck with curiosity as she looked at one of the bell towers. She ascended with trepidation at first, but her curiosity began to weigh more than her fear and she was drawn up the stairs, faster and faster. Hearing footsteps, the hunchback swung through The Forest and began to slip quietly down the stairs. At last they met, and he nearly knocked her back down the flight she had traveled, neither seeing each other in the dark. He caught her just before she landed. The hunchback had watched her praying in the cathedral many times, and his breath was swept from his lungs. She was his idol, a placeholder for God himself and for the love he had been denied so often throughout his life. And the duchess was raised with the ideals of nobility of the time: that a prince would one day meet her and save her from the cruel world. At that moment they met eyes, the hunchback straightened himself and took the form, she thought, of a prince. Thus their love began.

There are many stories to tell. He was the first one to take her to the gypsy theater where they danced until the sun rose, and she was reprimanded by her parents for a month; he protected her from pickpockets and muggers on more than one occasion; he even defended her honor from a lusty priest who did not know her societal position. He was an adventure to her. But somewhere along this adventure, she saw the true form he took in rare moments. She also noticed that he never prayed when she did, but rather watched her. She grew in the knowledge that he was full of falseness and self-loathing. At first she did not believe it due to her love, but she observed more and more instances of these afflictions and in prayer, she became convinced that he was not who she thought he was.

She told him about these dark revelations, and though he was broken hearted he could not fight this truth that he himself had lived in but denied for so long. He was a creature fractured by fate and broken by self-loathing. She asked him to change. Not to change his affliction, but to change his heart. To pray and to remove her from the place of God. Until he could, she said, they could not be together. But the hunchback could not, despite all his efforts, change his brokenness, and his bitterness and darkness grew with each effort. While he had removed himself from her, he watched her in the city and in the cathedral as she prayed, and his lust grew. One afternoon, as she was walking in the city, he descended upon her and kissed her. She received the kiss with a muted desire, neither fighting nor encouraging it. She had, after all, hoped for his return to the light and to her. But as they kissed, his form curved into its natural state and most alarmingly, his eyes began to separate from each other and his skin began to sag upon his bones. He had grown more disfigured than she ever imagined, and she forced him away and spat on him, telling him never to return to her sight.

Behind dark corners, down shadowy alleys, and through the cracks in plaster ceiling of the cathedral, he watched her and listened to every word. She was lonely for a time, but suitors soon came to her and she courted a few. Yet there was nothing quite like what she had in the old days, in her first love.

While the duchess was praying one night about her heart's sadness, the hunchback snuck behind the alter. "What should I do, Lord?" asked the duchess. And the hunchback replied in the smallest whisper, "Return to the hunchback." She had never heard the voice of God like that before, but looking around she saw no source of the voice, so well hidden was he. Again she prayed, "What should I do, Lord?" The hunchback replied, "Return to the hunchback." She gasped, unsure whether what she had heard was true. And so she left and returned again the next day. Again the same events took place. And again and again the next few days. When she spoke to her wisest counselors, they agreed that God was telling her something, but that she must be wrong about returning to such a creature. So she determined that she would pray once more, and if the answer was the same, she could not deny the voice of God.

But this time she determined to pray a different prayer. "God, if it has been your voice that has asked me to return to the hunchback, please provide a way for me to know. My dearest counselors have warned me that it is not your will, but how could it not be? Oh Lord, let nothing I see or hear tonight be false."

As she prayed this, the hunchback who had been listening from above the altar descended on a rope to her. Just as he reached the cross above the altar, the duchess opened her eyes and saw him. Her heart was uplifted. But as she reached out, she thought she saw something, but how could it be? In her memory of that night, she recalled that she saw the arm of the crucified Christ rip itself from the cross and grasp the pant leg of the hunchback as he descended. This caused him to lose his grip and to fall headfirst upon the corner of the altar. His head split open, and its contents spilled out upon the cathedral floor, and blood soaked her dress as she knelt. At that moment, the clock struck midnight and the cathedral bells rang out. She seemed unable to catch her breath, as if it had run from her lungs never to return and she thought she might die. Once the bells stopped, she was able to inhale and then she screamed and screamed.

She ran out of the cathedral, blood-soaked and shaking, and a cardinal caught her just as she tripped over a brick. Everything after that was blur. Sobs, blood, screams, gasps, shaken retellings; then she remembered, as if it were dream, being driven away by carriage to her house where there was bathwater and her maidens and a clean white dress. Then all went black, and she awoke at midday in her bedchambers.

The cathedral was closed for mass the following Sunday, but reopened after the tiles and broken altar were replaced. The arm of the Christ figure was not outstretched when the authorities went in that night, but there was one detail to corroborate her story—the nail that held the hand in place was missing and was never found. The icon remained for a hundred and fifty years, but time and degradation wore it away and it was replaced. It is now lost. As the centuries progressed, and old records were burnt or destroyed in the Revolution, the recollection of events changed. Each successive generation changed the characters they had learned to suit their favored values, until, at last, they no longer represented the figures of history. The duchess became a gypsy, the hunchback the hero, and one of her suitors was dramatized as a prince and villain.

The duchess went on to marry a scholar, a marriage of unlike kind that shocked her contemporaries. Her heart was mended in time, and they built a joyous life together. Their sons fought many foreign battles, and earned merit, land, and titles. Their estate survived the Revolution and still stands today as a university on a hill, west of Paris.

And of the hunchback, his body was not claimed by his family, who could not spare face, and he was placed in a paupers' graveyard. Many years later, these graves were exhumed, and the bones placed in the catacombs below Paris.

His skull now lies crushed in the middle of tens of thousands of others, unmarked, unknown, forgotten.

Overthinking, Overcoming?

by
Eleonora Cenzone

An echo
Present forms
that moves in awry ways.
It moves between the thoughts
causing them to blaze.

Chasms open
inside the brain
when I feel a lack of mine
slipping from my tongue
like a rock thrown on a lake,
falling on my chest
that like a mirror breaks.

A clot of reality
takes form between thoughts,
in the cornea it stacks
thickening its back.
Blurry images
reach the brain
thrown by hasty arms
in a well of apprehension
to stagnate in a puddle
of icy fear
and wrong comprehension.

But the more I give voice
to all these worries and white noise,
the more I see my fears
behind these senseless words.
The more I look
at that trembling reflection
the more I see the useless tension
that keeps together molecules
trapped between the cruel stones.

Someone came
and their love gave me words to sing:

Cocoon of idealist perfection

*be pierced by acception
by arms ready to hold
a heart that's human,
made of pulsing feelings,
rushing emotions.*

*Let these arms tear apart
the don'ts
the I am nots,
searching for what remains
after the haze of worries
fades away.*

Now I'm finding my own voice,
now I'm searching for new notes.
That's the only choice I have,
that's the only strength to stand.

A Note from the Poet, Eleonora Cenzone

Having a brain is difficult. I think in life there's a constant battle in trying to get as close as possible to the reality of things and trying to figure out what kind of stand we want to take in what we manage to understand. I've always been putting my self-worth into my performance, in all the things I would do in my life, and I've been putting effort and worried so much to just do everything right and as perfect as possible, causing much distress and suffering, always feeling like I alone was not enough. I feel like it's important to find our value within ourselves and not in things we are yet to accomplish. We are not perfect and will never be, we have our limits, faults, and peculiarities, but that's how it is, not in a way of just accepting things for how they are, but recognizing that we can't make every right decision, and we can't know beforehand what could be for the better or worse. I've heard many people struggle with these things, so I guess it's a very human thing. We're born on a fluctuating rock in a seemingly endless universe without an instruction manual for how to live our life, that can be confusing.

Solemn Manor

by
Collin Snitchler

Follow your heart and
trust your gut, they say
But what if your heart and gut
tear down your every move?

Living a life in solemn manor,
there is no gut to follow,
no certainty to hold or trust.
Living a life in solemn manor,
you choose a path in hope,
all the long while, holding your breath.

You make it appear so easy,
you who live by feeling.
You want me to be so trusting,
but endings are always in question.

How can I love another,
when love loses its definition?
How can I know what I want,
when wanting changes in seconds?
How can I trust my gut,
when my gut is twisted in torment?

Every moment I live, scorpions sting my nerve.
To go to bed hoping that life will be there,
knowing not what your fears will ask next,
To wake up in bed, doubting all that you know,
is a curse I'd wish not on the very worst man.

If you love the ones around you,
don't take that love for granted,
For in this life in solemn manor,
everything is in question.

A Note from the Poet, Collin Snitchler

On June 6th of this year, I was diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder. The path to this diagnosis was a long one, but it has clarified why I'm such a great mental gymnastics athlete: all the rules, all the self-isolation, all the endless searching. OCD is...hard to explain to those who don't have it or know someone with it, especially when the strongest subtypes I struggle with are not vigorously washing my hands but the avoidance and fear of intimate relationships and the fear of becoming paranoid schizophrenic like my late grandfather. Finishing my education, moving home from abroad, the pandemic, loss of job opportunities, and trying to start a long-distance relationship all came together in a perfect storm for my spinning mind. No number of "You know you're going to be okay, right?"s from friends was going to solve the endless questioning, doubts, and lack of trust in myself and others. My biggest struggle with OCD is a subtype called ROCD (relationship OCD), though OCD is still OCD, it can take different forms at different points in your life. This poem serves the things I'm feeling, the topic of this month, and also an ironic counter to the message of my poem in the first issue. Instead of trying to explain to you how it feels or send you a youtube link describing the scientific backing of this diagnosis as well as clinical discussions, I wanted to make you feel how I feel at some point almost every day (though this is decreasing in frequency as time goes on due to therapy). I wanted to bring you through the veil of your wellness into my mental *unwellness* (specifically within my relationship fears). I hope you enjoy your time outside of solemn manor.

Positive note: Falling in love is something I'm capable of, I know it because I am.