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*Misassembled Monsters*

Jenn Brown

A thesis presented to the  
Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts  
Washington University in Saint Louis

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Visual Arts

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## Table of Contents

|                               |    |
|-------------------------------|----|
| Abstract .....                | i  |
| Introduction .....            | ii |
| 1. Armory .....               | 1  |
| 2. Metal .....                | 8  |
| 3. Monsters .....             | 21 |
| 4. Memory .....               | 31 |
| Conclusion .....              | 40 |
| Notes .....                   | 41 |
| Bibliography .....            | 43 |
| Appendix: <i>Eidola</i> ..... | 44 |
| Images .....                  | 74 |

## **Abstract**

This thesis is a narrative of personal and material history. Through my work in painting, sculpture, and installation, I seek to share my story of emotional armoring in an attempt to connect to an audience. In my work, I look to my personal memories of growing up in a small, midwestern town and armoring myself with emotional barriers against its social construct of “normalcy.” Inspired by Medieval suits of armor and the characteristics of Goth culture throughout history, I employ my work to present the stage of a theatrical battleground. Creating each of my pieces is a fight for the work, against my own dysfunctional body, and against the fear of appearing abnormal. The following chapters are my exploration into the causes and effects of emotional barriers that turn into psychological cages. I investigate the narrative elements of my work in relation to my fictional narrative—included—and compare my work to that of corresponding artists.

## Introduction

My art practice began as a way for me to express and investigate the physical limitations of my body. I relied on my work to speak about things relating to my ailing body that I was not comfortable discussing with others. Working in this manner, however, I realized the danger of trapping those unspoken things inside and releasing them only through my work. My current work exposes that danger, providing a narrative of my journey to unlock my own psychological cage and escape the monsters within it.

My work is inspired by histories. I seek to combine my personal history of armoring myself, mentally, with the history of physical armor, inspired by Medieval European suits. I employ depictions of armor as a physical metaphor for mental barriers. I want my work in painting, sculpture, and installation to illustrate the long-term effects of living within those barriers and the war between protection and imprisonment.

I work primarily with metal, using raw steel in my work as a metaphor for human bone and an ailing inner-body structure. Each sculpture bears the evidence of my physical battle to create it. A finished work becomes an artifact of my fight with the metal and with my own body. Each piece acts as a trophy to remind me that I can overcome my physical disabilities.

Part of my research for my current body of work was to investigate the cause of emotional armoring, specifically my own. Because of learned behavior about what is “normal,” I deal with fears and anxieties of my condition being an inconvenience to others. In my work, I explore common sources of these fears, the changing social climate of “normalcy,” and how the ideals of Goth culture seek to combat traditional norms.

My interest in Goth culture spans the culture's history. From ancient Germanic tribes to the Victorian era gothic novel, to contemporary Goth subcultures, my work is rooted in similar characteristics. I want the presentation of my work to resemble a romantic and theatrical atmosphere similar to stories from gothic pasts.

# 1 Armory

*“Black humor, psychological drama, emotional trauma, or simply the sense of the past inhabiting the present: today’s writers and artists are re-imagining what ghosts are, what they do, what they mean to us—even where they ‘live’ ...whether as metaphor, Gothic reality or something indefinably in-between...These are lively days for ghosts.”<sup>i</sup>*

**Susan Owens**

I often feel like a ghost inside my own body. I focus on memories and past events to learn about the why of everything. I am a walking emotional blockade and the leftovers of an ill-remembered, un-ailing body. I am armed with a walking cane and armored from everything else.

I've always been fascinated with history, any sort of history, but especially my own. I think that is why memories carry such a presence in my mind. I base the reasoning for the way I think and act on what I remember from past experiences. I read my body's history like a map-its surface covered in memories and scars of moments when this sack of skin failed to protect me, of when my bodily armor was defeated.

The concept of armoring is a key element in my work. Whether mental or physical, such as skin, fur, animal shells, or clothing, armor is used for protection. It always has vulnerabilities, however, and brings isolation along with that protection. My work in sculpture, painting, found objects, and installation explores these dueling aspects of armoring, often incorporating a physical representation of suited-armor elements to illustrate the concept. The armorial elements I build are inspired by medieval suits of armor from around the world. With the armor pieces, I reference the ancient history and craftsmanship that initially interested me in sculpture, and the first memories I have of an affinity for them.

Nestled in a secluded recess of the lower level of the Saint Louis Art Museum, is the arms and armor gallery. To access it, I descend the mysterious western stairwell that is dimly lit and lined with mirrors. It stands in stark contrast from the florescent hallway lighting that lives between the mirrors and the displaced entryways into the installations of Victorian era furniture. The doorway at the end of the hall, however, transports me down another set of stairs into a room completely wrapped in wooden paneling.



The lighting in this room, too, is dim. It is a rare occurrence to happen upon another soul in the gallery. The walls are high and lined with displays of medieval weaponry. There is an air of reverence about the room that mingles with the echo of even the softest footsteps and gives the space its own weight. There's a magic in the quiet. That one room shifts me away from the museum and into another world.

There a display case that sits in one corner of the gallery. It houses a seventeenth century half-suit of Italian armor made of gilded steel and decorated with a pattern of golden crescents. Seeing it is like greeting an old friend, one that I can't exactly recall meeting for the first time.



Italian Half Armor on display at the Saint Louis Art Museum<sup>ii</sup>

I've been visiting the art museum since I was a small child. My family used to frequent the fifty-mile trip to Saint Louis, but as my small hometown grew into a more metropolitan area, we had less need to travel into the city. By the time I was old enough to retain coherent

memories of the museum, my family hardly ventured into Saint Louis at all. Occasionally, though, I would think about the all-wooden room with a staircase leading down into it from either side. The room grew more mysterious the longer I tried to remember where it was. It was lost to me and the rest of my family among the countless museums from years of summer vacations. I began to wonder if I'd actually been to the room at all, or if it was just a figment of my imagination.

When my sister and I were old enough to go into the city on our own, however, I became reacquainted with the museum. It wasn't until I ventured off alone on one of these trips that I met the room again.

The magic of a long-forgotten memory hit me as soon as I walked through the doorway. Every display piece was as familiar as an old photograph that appeared behind the couch after years of neglect. Each time I visit that gallery, I go over the details of each ornate sword and spear. I marvel at the painstaking detail on the guns and crossbows and suits of armor in the display cases. I get the sense of discovering a wonderful secret. I feel the ghosts of history and poetry traversing the gallery, questing for a new home.

Medieval suits of armor were common in the Middle Ages because of royal tournaments, royal guards, and battles over lands and lines of succession. Each purpose required a different type of armor. Dress or parade armor was lighter, more flexible, and more intricately designed. It was worn by nobles and royalty that were dressed for show rather than for combat. Knights that fought in battle wore armor that was tougher but still presentable enough for possible death and burial, while common soldiers fought in whatever crude armor was available.<sup>iii</sup>

With the provided protection, however, comes the potential for struggle. An ornately-crafted suit of armor worn on long campaigns becomes nothing but a lovely hindrance. The

thicker and tougher the armor, the slower the movement and the more wear on the body that inhabits it. Any armor-any barrier, physical or mental, that is constructed to protect can and will transform into the wearer's downfall.

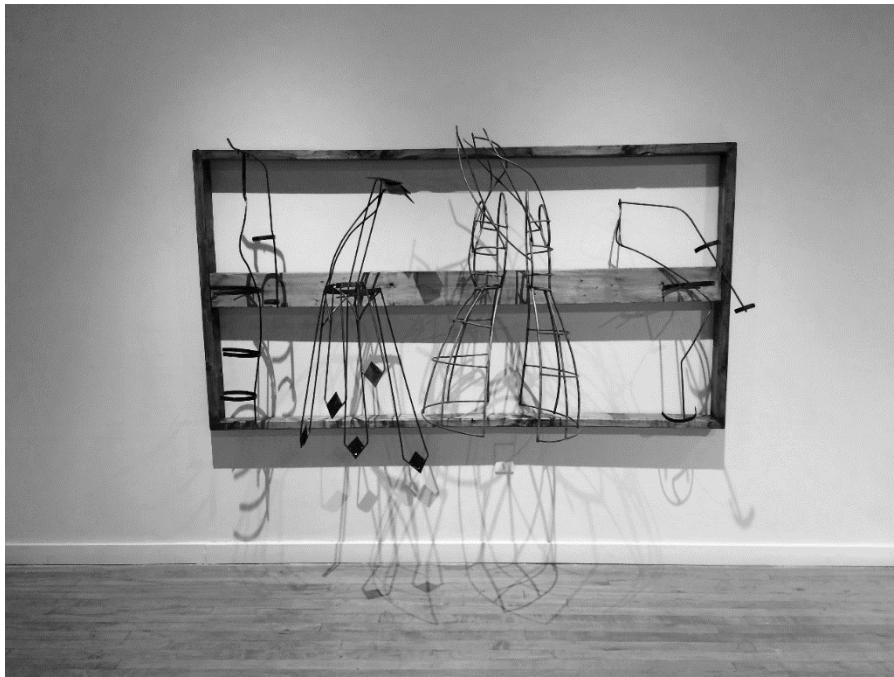


Fig. 1 *Armor Rack (Thrust, Weight, Isolation, Restraint)*, Steel, wood, and oil paint, 2017

Because I live with a physical disability, this concept of armoring is constantly at the forefront of my mind. It is the seed of what I must choose to share, or not share with others. At one time, I had many mental barriers in place that kept my emotions locked inside. They ate at me and I struggled with anger and aggression issues. These psychological barriers are what I refer to as existential armor. My art practice helped me explore these challenges and identify my armor. I realized that it is something I have worn since childhood. I was raised in a small town where doing or saying things that drew excess attention to oneself or one's family was frowned upon. Negative feelings just weren't talked about. I carried this ingrained suppression with me

as an adult. When I was diagnosed with a joint disease I thought of it as an imperfection, something that would reflect negatively on me and my family. I didn't talk about it unless it was absolutely necessary. Walking with a cane was a source of great anxiety because I feared the public's pity, judgement, or negative commentary.

My wall sculpture, *Thrust, Weight, Isolation, Restraint*, presents four aspects of self-protection. I fabricated the four armorial apparatuses to my exact body measurements. Each piece illustrates one of the four aspects of the title. They are displayed on an armor rack and are easily removable, a reminder to myself that the armor is always there for me to put on and to remove. The first piece on the left, *Thrust*, outlines the left side of my body from neck to knee. Each of the bands that hold it in place has small nibs welded to the inside. These are not sharp, but dig into the skin and joints causing an aggressive soreness. The second piece, *Weight*, wraps around the right side of my waist and up onto my left shoulder. The piece is not extremely heavy at first, but the weight on these areas of my body bog me down after prolonged wear. The third, *Isolation*, covers both sides of my body in a caged suit of armor. The greaves extend away from my body so that no one can get too close. The metal strands sit in front of my face, restricting visibility and communication. The fourth, *Restraint*, has a hold for my right shoulder. A metal rod that extends across my chest and down my left arm. Partial straps hold my arm, waist, and leg in place. Wearing the piece strictly hinders my movement. Attempting to move one sequestered limb causes more restriction for another.

By identifying my own existential armor and where it stems from, I hope that my work can help an audience identify their own. I put emotional barriers in place to shield myself against the outside world. Wearing this self-inflicted armor for too long, however, wears on me and begins to trap me inside a mental cage. My work is a recognition of that cage, an awareness

of my own soured armor, of the monsters that threaten to haunt the daylight if I can't break myself free of them.

## 2 Metal

*"If I stitch together a monster, does that prove its existence?"<sup>iv</sup>*  
**E.B. Hudspeth**

In my work, steel is a metaphor for bone, for the human skeletal structure. It carries the weight of everything I go through, and everything I put myself through, both the physical and emotional. It is important that my work has the same cold and raw, weighty presence to it. The pieces need to appear tough, representing the protection they once provided, yet enfeebled and afflicted.

My first metal sculpture was a piece titled, *This is My Body*, and was meant to represent flesh and bone. It was a rectangular piece of steel, made of warped and patchworked pieces that stood at my exact height. A sheer, flesh-colored, dress I made hung off the front of the plate.



Fig. 2 *This is My Body*,  
Steel and fabric, 2014



Fig. 3 *Pin Points*, Steel and plaster gauze, 2016

Later, I cut the steel rectangle into four pieces and repurposed them into pedestals to use for a piece titled, *Pin Points*. The act of cutting up a representation of my own body and reusing the pieces was not intentionally evocative of self-mutilation or self-sacrifice. This is a theme,

however, that took the stage in a set of quasi-functional steel walking canes, *An Arm and A Leg...and A Back*.

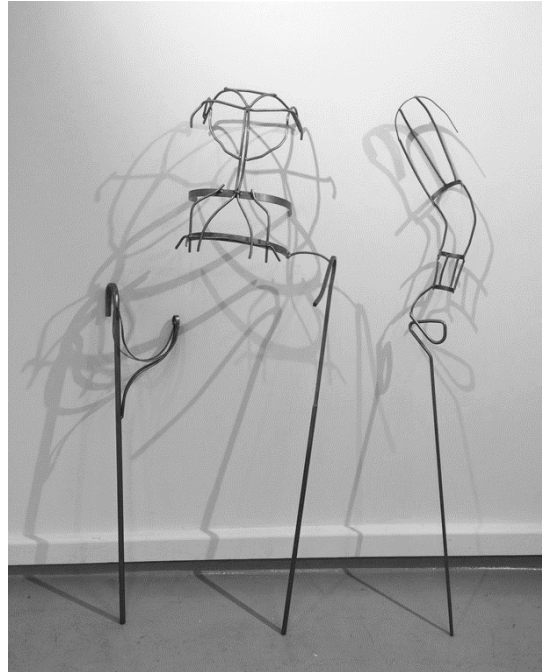


Fig. 4 *And Arm and A Leg...and A Back*, Steel and aerosol paint, 2017

I painted the canes a metallic bronze color that is evocative of jewelry. I wanted to elevate a traditional assistance apparatus to a fashionable accessory. Each of the three walking canes is functional, technically. Functional, meaning that it is stable, can support weight, and might assist a person while walking. They also have a dark sense of humor about the trials that come with walking aids. Each of the canes seeks to solve one of these trials by attaching to the body and becoming an extension of it, but in doing so, causes another obstacle. Making use of the canes becomes a sacrifice of one function, of one body part, for another. They transform from an adornment to a dysmorphic appendage.





*Cockfeather Mask*, Rebecca Horn<sup>v</sup>

This concept is similar to Rebecca Horn's work, especially her wearable apparatuses. Her piece, *Cockfeather Mask*, is designed for the head, but it looks to me like a skewed headdress. Thin pieces of leather and metal outline the profile of a face and have buckles that extend around the back of the head. The face is covered in a bushel of feathers that extend from the forehead to collarbone, obstructing the frontal view of both the performer and the viewer.

To me, this piece approaches masking in a unique way. Donning a mask places one at an advantage. It lets the wearer hide identity and emotions from others while still being able to see. This mask, however, does not. Unlike my extended walking canes that sacrifice use of the wearer's limb for another, *Cockfeather Mask* sacrifices site and places the wearer at the mercy of others. Masking the face entirely leaves the rest of the body open for scrutiny.

Horn's wearable pieces are presented in gallery settings as artifacts left behind after a performance. I display *An Arm and A Leg...and A Back*, and other bodily armatures, in the same

manner. When the object is viewed alone, it evokes a coldness and loneliness associated with medical devices and equipment and leaves an opening to imagine any body within the confines of the structure.

I continued to work with the representation of my body, and by extension, any body, to address the act of living with a chronic joint illness. My current work broadens this scope by looking beyond the embodied self and the personal functions and disfunctions. It focuses on the physical and mental effects of living inside a psychological cage built from existential armor.

The sinewy and spindly appendages in my current work take on organic forms that hold up scattered pieces of armor. Their wild activity bursts through and around the armor, giving support while simultaneously attacking and engulfing. It is through this dual nature within the pieces that I express a gothic atmosphere. Similar to the drama and theatrics I admire in gothic novels, my building processes and finished pieces show their own theatricality. Each piece bears the physical marks, the battle scars, of its creation. I want them to display the evidence of my body's battle with the work, as well as the physical conflict within the work itself. I make each piece aggressive and violent, but paradoxically wild and alluring.



Raw steel process details: welding, heat bending, sanding.

The battle I have with my work is not a fight against it, but a fight with it, and for it. Metal fabrication is extremely physical, but it's the element of the hard labor that excites me about it. I never know how my body will behave throughout the day, so I have to be prepared to adapt my way of working at a moment's notice, or in some cases, to pack it in and go home for the day. There are two kinds of exhaustion. There is the slow-moving weakness that drags on every part of the body, and that makes me feel tired even when I'm sitting down. It's the feeling of a hairbrush being too heavy to lift. The good kind of exhaustion comes at the end of a long day when I feel as though my feet could give out, but I've accomplished something and can sleep happily. That exhaustion makes me feel alive and powerful, and that is why I keep working the way I do. When working in this manner, the pieces I build allow me to connect to a viewer by sharing experiences of my vulnerabilities.

To create this work, each sculpture starts with the right piece of metal. Depending on the sculpture, I either use found material and play off its form or rust/water/grease patterns, or I cut

the form I want from it. I usually have some idea of what it should be before I start, but I always keep an open mind and work with the piece, letting it tell me what it wants to be. The planar elements of the piece, i.e. the armorial elements, are an assemblage of thin steel formed to the proper shape and found pieces of steel trim. The linework created with thin steel rods are welded onto the piece then heat bent with an oxy-acetylene torch. When a piece is built, I'll smooth out most rough edges or tips, but I never remove all the evidence of the shaping process. Everything the metal has gone through before and after I work with it is part of its history and part of its memory. When I work with steel, it becomes a stand-in for my body, my own skeleton. The marks I make on the steel, the pushes and pulls, the struggle of contorting beyond its initial range of motion, are all a reflection of what I experience when working. I put my work and my body through the same enervative processes. Showing those processes on a finished artwork is my way of keeping a record of the struggles and victories I experience with building each piece.

I choose pieces of steel that already show an interesting history and display this in the finished work. I usually do very little to the surface of it. Any marks, rust, or coloring from the heat is still visible through any stains I use. I lock rust onto the surface with a wax sealant, and only on occasion do I cover the surface with another substance entirely.



Raw steel sheet, surface pattern.

My most recent work, *Eidola*, is a steel installation that illustrates a mental cage I imagined for myself and for the protagonist of a short novel, also entitled *Eidola*. It gives the illusion of a cage by displaying broken pieces of barred walls and a ceiling. The cage sectionals create the feeling of an enclosed space without isolating the work from the viewer. Entering the space allows the viewers to experience, or recognize, the sense of entrapment and the unsettling knowledge that things they dread might be encroaching on their personal space from the outside, as well as from inside their own mind.

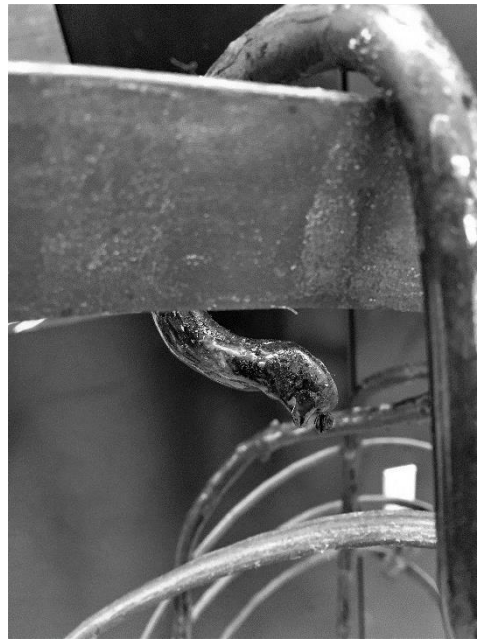
Inside the cage of *Eidola* are multiple biomorphic, steel sculptures I refer to as *Phantasms*. A phantasm is something fantastic, an illusion or apparition. I refer to these sculptures as such because their representations are ambiguous. They are slightly humanoid, suggestive of bodily forms, vaguely monstrous and animalistic. They are armor and skeleton, both predator and tortured prey. The more uncertainty surrounds the creatures, the more

unsettling they become. The *Phantasms* have numbers as titles to add to their mysteriousness. Naming something implies knowledge of or mastery over it. A monster with no name can be much more terrifying.

The *Phantasms* are surface-treated with two different techniques, sometimes simultaneously. The first medium is roofing tar. The tar is an incredibly thick, deep brown substance with the consistency of wet cement. I apply the tar to some pieces without manipulating the consistency. The viscous substance smears over the steel like an oily mud or congeals in sections like matted hair. When thinned with mineral spirits, the tar acts like a glaze. The other technique I employ to is to cover and dip portions of the sculpture in an acrylic medium that drips from the form and dries clear. Coating the piece with a mixture of the tar glaze and red oil paint gives it an organic sense, a tone of the body. The surface texture appears wet and provides a visceral, uncanny resemblance to unknown innards.



*Phantasm #1*, Roofing tar detail



*Phantasm #9* Mixed media glaze detail

Accompanying the installation is its companion novella, *Eidola*, included as appendix A. Both works have the same name because the installation piece depicts a location, or a situation from the novella, come to life. The written *Eidola* takes place in a small town where the protagonist, Celia Pavins, finds herself locked in a place, Eidola, born out of her own nightmares. As the story progresses, she is haunted by unknown phantoms and it unclear if the horrors she faces are real or imagined. The *Phantasm* sculptures are physical representations of what monsters terrorize the young Celia in the story, and the cage gives a taste of her experiences trapped inside her own self-inflicted cage.

An eidolon has two definitions; it is another name for an apparition or phantom, something with more fantastical powers than a ghost, and it is also an ideal or idealized subject.<sup>vi</sup> I named the nightmarish space where my own psychological cage lives, Eidola (the plural of eidolon), because it represents the absolute downfall of chasing a phantom ideal. For a long time, my skewed “ideal” self was someone who never let anyone see when she was hurting. I thought a day was successful if it ended without anyone knowing or guessing that I was in pain. I kept everyone at a distance because the more I let someone know me, the more difficult it is for me to hide my struggles from them. Eidola is a place I retreated to and began to let my psychological armor consume me. It is a place I hope never to return to.

The cage motif in my work represents a physical entrapment of the body because of a cage within the mind. Louise Bourgeois said of her series of *Cell* sculptures and installations, “[They] represent different types of pain: the physical, the emotional and psychological, and the mental and intellectual. When does the emotional become physical? When does the physical become emotional?”<sup>vii</sup>

Bourgeois' *Cell (Three White Marble Spheres)*, evokes contrasting senses of protection and imprisonment. I view the marble spheres inside as human figures, perhaps a family. Approaching the piece with this concept, the transparent and translucent glass panels of the cell walls turn my view into an invasion of privacy. The mirror's reflection aims directly at the spherical figures reminds me of surveillance mirrors. With it, I can spy on the spheres from virtually any angle. Everything about them is on display; the cell walls may protect them, but they cannot hide from me, the viewer.



*Cell (Three White Marble Spheres)*  
Louise Bourgeois 1993<sup>viii</sup>



Fig. 5 *Eidola*  
Steel, roofing tar, and acrylic media, 2018

There is a similar intertwining of prison and protection in my work. My cage evokes imprisonment, but at least when I'm inside it, nothing else can get to me. There is a familiarity in the self-inflicted; it can be more tolerable than the criticism of others.

I align my work with the Bourgeois *Cells* because of a reference to the relationship between physical and mental pain. One major difference, however, lies in the origin of the cage



object. In *Cell (Three White Marble Spheres)*, the cell and the objects inside don't appear to be related to one another except by their proximity. I don't know where the cell comes from or why the spheres dwell inside it. In *Eidola*, the cage is mine, it is of me. It is something I built, both physically and metaphorically, for my own protection. Once it turns into a thing of imprisonment, however, I must recognize its self-inflicted nature, and I must be the one to dismantle it.



*These Decades that We Never Sleep, Black Drums*, Terence Koh, 2004<sup>ix</sup>

The effects of the tar and acrylic mediums I employ in my pieces are similar to those I feel from the black-washed, mixed media in Terence Koh's installations, entitled *These Decades that We Never Sleep*. In the piece from that series, *Black Drums*, a matted black mess appears to seep from an entangled drum set. The drums imply the imprint of a human figure; it stands as a placeholder, an apparent void, once occupied by a human figure. To me, the dark streak of

undiscernible substances feels foreboding, like it is creeping toward me and threatening to devour me. It holds an added sense of the grotesque for me after reading some of the media listed in the piece's description. Among the mix of various materials, some of Koh's own bodily fluids are listed as materials. He applies ambiguity and what I perceive as possible shock value to give the viewer an unnerving, visceral experience. I employ synthetic materials in my work to create textures that implicate a body or alien organism because I want the *Phantasms* to feel ambiguous to the viewer. They could be part-animal, part-insect, part-human, or a grotesque realized vision from the depths of my imagination.

# 3

## Monsters

“If I am the phantom, it is because man's hatred has made me so. If I am to be saved it is because your love redeems me.”<sup>x</sup>

**Gaston Leroux**

Something grotesque is something or someone fanciful or fantastic, something distorted to the point of ugliness or absurdity. The Goth subculture has always celebrated such distortions. The goth approach to life is to find the beauty and specialness in the grotesque and the unwanted, in the abnormal. This is the same way I approach my practice. I work with scrap metal that was cast aside. I celebrate what makes each piece of steel unique instead of grinding and sanding it to a uniform surface. The monstrous creatures I fabricate hold an eerie loveliness in their elegant appendages even though they often end in gnarled joints and sinister ligaments.

I take inspiration for my work from both contemporary Goth culture and ancient Gothic architecture. A vital part of my current research is understanding how those two subjects came to share the same name.<sup>xi</sup>

My first experience with Goth culture occurred when I was about eight-years-old. I saw a teenage boy wearing baggy black clothes covered in straps and black rings. He had lime green hair that went halfway down his back, white-out contacts, and a face covered in white and black makeup. My mother thought he was dressed up for Halloween and told me not to look, afraid his makeup would scare me. It was definitely strange; I had never seen a person dressed that way before, but I found his appearance intriguing, not frightening.

As I grew older, I held a constant enthusiasm for Goth culture. The draw stems from an acceptance of the dark things in life. I've had what I would consider an above-average experience with death. It was something I dealt with for the first time at a very young age. It sobered me from ideas about a perfect world where terrible things never happened. Having been to over a dozen funerals by the time I was sixteen, I no longer felt the need to sugarcoat difficult things and I was comfortable around people who felt the same. Around the same time, I fell in

love with eighteenth and nineteenth century art, fashion, and literature, with a world of dark and seductive stories that relied on mystery and suspense.

This world and its numerous subcultures that celebrate the sublime and dualities in human nature are rooted in a history from which they take their name.

Embracing the abnormal isn't a concept only within Goth culture. Though there are societal norms that we still feel compelled to adhere to, what is normal for every person is different. I've become comfortable with being abnormal. I grew up as a bit of the wild child in a small town, and as the weird artsy girl in a small high school. As an adult, I've become the odd one out as the woman at the steel supplier, and abnormal as a young person with a walking cane. While many people who insist on staring or asking about it assume I've had surgery or a temporary injury, I do get asked often if the cane is a prop or, my personal favorite, "a hipster fashion statement."

The social politics surrounding normalcy are changing, however. As a society, we're realizing the damage it can cause to refer to people in terms of normal and abnormal. Describing someone as "abnormal" or "disabled" can imply that they are inadequate or less-than. This can create pressure on someone who is differently-abled to perform and struggle in silence with everyday tasks to just appear "normal." In a new criticism of normalcy surrounding the disabled, editors Gareth Thomas and Dikaios Sakellariou state, "People with disabilities, and the people around them, negotiate what needs to be done in order to produce an outcome that they recognize as good...The anticipated outcomes of these negotiations might appear to be mundane, yet they are crucial in determining how disabled people perceive themselves and how they are recognized by others."<sup>xii</sup>

It seems that the rest of the world is finally catching up to the art community's views on what makes someone "abnormal." Many artists have been long-term advocates for working with what makes one different and using it to fuel artwork that comments on what makes those differences taboo.



*Natura morta (medical cabinet)*, Mona Hatoum, 2012<sup>xiii</sup>

In Mona Hatoum's piece, *Natura morta (medical cabinet)*, I see a commentary on what people are willing to put into their bodies to fit into what society says is normal. This iteration of the piece—there are several—a medicine cabinet that looks to be made from metal hangs on the wall. The door of the cabinet has an open panel where a mirror may have sat, allowing the viewer to see inside. On three glass shelves, sit multicolored objects that appear to glass grenades. The glass forms and rich colors could be a reference to perfume bottles and cosmetics, or to medications that are often brightly colored like candy. Looking at this piece reminds me of all the opposing opinions and studies that say what I put in and on my body might have harmful

chemicals or cause drastic, long-term effects on my health. It is as if Mona Hatoum is presenting me with a choice in this piece of which grenade I'd like to carry around today.



Fig. 6 *1-3 Still Standing*, Steel, 2016



*Untitled (wheelchair)*, Mona Hatoum, Stainless steel and rubber, 1998<sup>xiv</sup>

Something I admire in some of Hatoum's other work, such as *Untitled (wheelchair)*, is the subtle presentation of a disturbing element. In this wheelchair piece, a seemingly standard wheelchair sits on the gallery floor. Upon further inspection, though, it dawns on me that large wheels allowing someone seated in a wheelchair to operate it independently are not present in this chair. Anyone seated in the chair must have someone push them. The handles on the back of the chair, however, have been replaced with knife blades. This locks both parties into a mutual, and potentially torturous, conundrum. The seated person can't move without the aid of someone to push them, but the mobile person can't assist them without cutting their hands on the chair.

This piece speaks to a concept that I am all too familiar with, though on a less extreme scale. As a disabled person, I have a lot of trouble asking for help. I have what I know is an irrational fear of being an inconvenience or burden on others by asking for assistance. I see a sort of dark humor in *Untitled (wheelchair)* that reminds me it could be much worse; I've never asked anyone to physically harm themselves in order to help me.

That fear and humor is what I wanted to evoke with *1-3: Still Standing*. This chair was the first in a set of four that represent my body in a pose I might take while enduring various levels of pain on the standard 1-10 scale. *1-3* is modeled after the shape of my body when I stand while using my cane. The chair has a comedic approach. It looks almost cartoonish and has an element of the absurd as a chair that is using a cane. Looking closer, however, I wanted viewers to notice that the chair looks worn and a little beaten. The chair appears shabbily put together and is resting on the cane rather than its front two legs. I hope that it reminds the viewer of what it's like to keep smiling, or standing, through the weariness.

The quality of absurdity is something I always keep in mind when making my work. Whether the outcome of the piece is more comedic or unnerving, it's the improbability or absurdity of a piece that makes it so. When I'm building the figural form of a piece, human or otherwise, I try to take the piece a step beyond what a figure could do or how it could move realistically.





Fig. 7 *Weight a Minute*, Steel, 2017



Fig. 8 *Phantasm #9*,  
Steel, oil paint, and roofing tar, 2018

My piece, *Weight a Minute*, depicts an armature of a figure that is bound at the wrists to two dumbbells. The figure is cut off at the waist and appears that it might float away if not for the weights tying it to the ground. The figure is floating in space, but I exaggerated the arch of its back and neck to emphasize the strain of attempting to pull away from the ground.

The absurd nature of *Phantasm #9*'s posture isn't as graceful. While this piece doesn't depict a human figure, it's tendrils reference legs and a torso. This piece is much more animated than *Weight a Minute*. The *Phantasm*'s legs and mid-section bend and extend in a much more extreme manner than any figure could.

In discussing her work, Eva Hesse said, "Art and work and art and life are very connected and my whole life has been absurd. There isn't a thing in my life that has happened that hasn't been extreme - personal health, family, economic situations...absurdity is the key word..."<sup>xv</sup>

This statement resonates with me because I often feel the same. My work is incredibly autobiographical, making it impossible for my artwork and my life not to be connected. The extremes I feel in my life come out in my work. I see the absurdity of letting the little problems stress me out so much that they feel big. I see through building an entire body of work based around armoring, that the reasons I've worn that armor for so long are, in short, absurd.

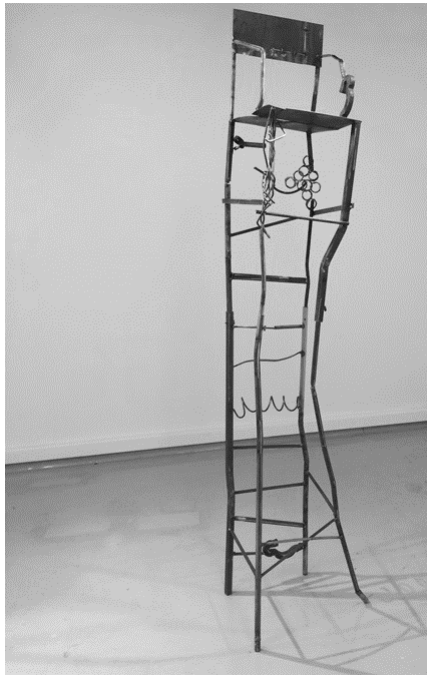
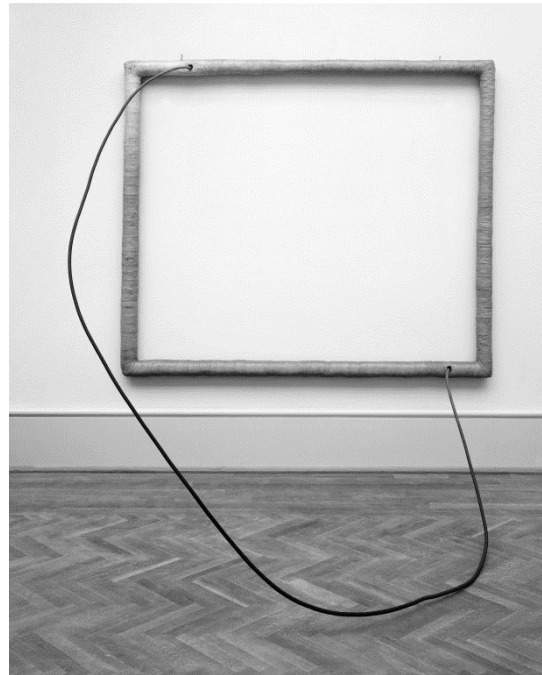


Fig. 9 *60° Sideways*, Steel, 2017



*Hang Up*, Eva Hesse, Acrylic on cloth over wood; acrylic on cord over steel tube, 1966<sup>xvi</sup>

Eva Hesse referred to *Hang Up* as, “the most important early statement I made. It was the first time my idea of absurdity of extreme feeling came through... [The frame] is all tied up like a hospital bandage—as if someone broke an arm...It is extreme and that is why I like it and don't like it. [It's] something and yet nothing and—oh! more absurdity!”<sup>xvii</sup>

I'm drawn to the fact that Hesse refers to the piece as a statement. I like to interpret that as the piece saying something to me, the viewer. I see the absurdity in *Hang Up* in its actions.

The piece consists of an empty, rectangular frame on the wall and a thin rod that extends out into the gallery from the top left corner, rests on the floor, and reattaches to the frame at the bottom right corner. The frame on the wall is telling me it's going to be a painting, but then this rod, seemingly arbitrary in scale, juts out from the frame and announces its presence by commanding the physical space as if refusing to be seen as only a normal painting. It wants to be a sculpture, too.

My piece, *60° Sideways*, commands space in a comparable way. Its height of 7 ½ feet demands to be seen. It's a chair that sits on extremely tall legs. The only way to reach it would be to ascend an impossibly rickety ladder that climbs up the back of the chair. With this piece I wanted to evoke a sense of unattainable comfort, of that feeling when I need to sit down, but no chair is ever comfortable enough for me. My legs joints are tired and sore but sitting in a chair would make the constant pain in my hips worse. The absurdity of the chair is that even if one decided to attempt the dysfunctional ladder, one would still have to climb over the back of the chair to sit in it.

The chair is called *60° Sideways* because at the time I was building it, I discovered that my original medical diagnosis was incorrect. The information completely blind-sided me and in a moment of extreme emotions, I said something about my life being turned completely upside down. After realizing that was a bit melodramatic, I said that it had only turned 60° sideways. This piece was an outlet for my frustrations. Having a label for my joint condition helped me feel, in a way, normal. I was terrified of the notion of not belonging anywhere, of strangers' disbelief if I didn't have a name or a reason behind the "cane girl." I put that fear into the chair, making it a sort of caricature of myself that let absurd worries alter the angle of my life for a while. This chair reminds me that the struggle to normalcy isn't worth my time.

It isn't always that simple, but I am fairly comfortable with my own abnormalities. Most of what makes me that way is something I've done by choice. What challenges me though, is my particular brand of normalcy, the everyday interaction with friends and colleagues. I've made decisions to be generally more open about my medical situation, but I do not like to be so open about it when I need help because of my condition. Part of the internal battle I fight against my own psychological armor is to not let myself feel weak or that I'm burdening people by asking for help. Normal for me is pain and exhaustion, every day, sometimes all-day long. Normal is learning to use my body in unusual ways so as not to wear myself out. Normal is the frustration of never getting comfortable in a chair, the desperation for someone to understand yet not wishing this body on anyone. Normal is turning to those I love when I need support, being grateful that I am still capable of doing what I love, and remembering that nothing is permanent.

## 4 Memory

*“...what the mind feels like is still, as the ancients imagined it, an inner space—like a theatre—in which we picture, and it is these pictures that allow us to remember. The problem is not that people remember through photographs, but that they remember only the photographs. This remembering through photographs eclipses other forms of understanding, and remembering...To remember is, more and more, not to recall a story but to be able to call up a picture...Narratives can make us understand. Photographs do something else: they haunt us.”<sup>xviii</sup>*

**Susan Sontag**

I view the body of my artwork as a gothic novel in sculptural form. They have many of the basic elements in common. Traditional characteristics of a gothic novel include: remote setting; often taking place in gothic mansions or castles; a gloomy atmosphere; macabre plot elements; setting and/or characters; dealings with magic or the occult; an overwhelming sense of mystery and suspense; heightened emotions; drama and theatricality; and a tragically flawed hero.<sup>xix</sup> My artworks reflect these characteristics through the stories they tell a viewer.

Susan Sontag discusses storytelling through photographs and remembering. It's true that a picture can speak a thousand words, but which of those are the correct words? An image conveys something different to each person who looks at it. Without the narrative behind it, we can only guess at what the photographer wants us to understand.

My memory works in a comparable way. Sontag claims that remembering through images hinders other forms of memory. A memory might play through my mind in images, but the way to get the truest memory of that moment is to listen to other narratives of it. The two processes must work together, the picture and the story that goes with it.

Some memories I have of my childhood are only because of a photograph. Seeing the photo helps me recall moments that go beyond the one captured by a camera. Other memories, however, are just stills glued to my mind. They've lost their narrative and float at the bottom of a hatbox inside my mind. Those images may be lost, but I don't consider them haunting. For something to be truly haunting, the touch of it needs to be remembered, not only the visual impression. Sometimes it's the ghosts of little moments that leave a larger scar.

Ghostly implications aside, "haunting memories" of this sort are at the root of my work. I'm touched by images I can't un-see, by moments when I or those closest to me stood silent for the sake of propriety, or worse, convenience. I reflect these memories in my work often by

employing an element of the grotesque and the phantasmagoric. I build some pieces so that they seem to defy gravity; they appear as if they should not be able to hold their own weight. They are theatrical in their slow reveal of their more gruesome elements.

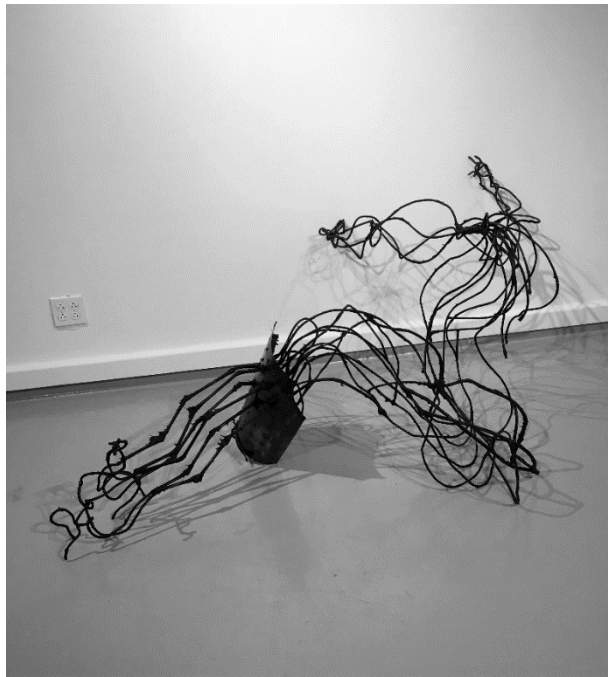


Fig. 10 *Phantasm #8*, Steel, roofing tar, and oil paint, 2018

My piece, *Phantasm #8*, does not actually use the wall for support. It holds its own weight, fully supporting the appendages that appear to be scuttling up the wall. I want this piece to be unsettling at first glance. Its dualistic structural elements are both graceful and gnarled. Its body is one large appendage that shifts from crooked, segmented lengths that plunge through an armor breastplate into a sweeping form that splits like a tail or a pair of legs before scaling the wall. Tar coats most of the piece with a lovely muck that is meant to be intriguing yet mildly repulsive. The breastplate, when viewed from its behind, is punctured by numerous sharpened pins. It's meant to be a semi-hidden and mildly disturbing detail that dawns on the viewer

slowly. The torturous element of this bit of armor puts a concrete point on my representation of crippling mental barriers.



*The Painter and the Time*,  
André Masson, 1938<sup>xx</sup>

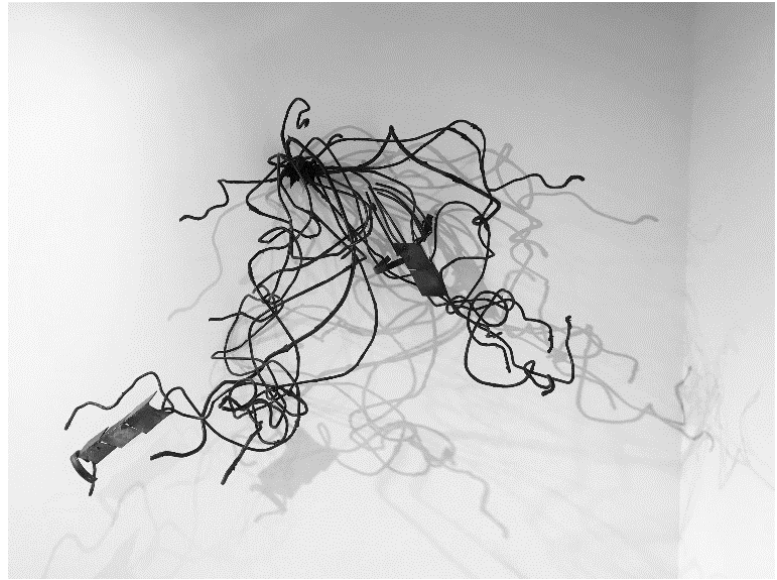


Fig. 11 *Phantasm #12*, Steel, roofing tar, and oil paint, 2017

André Masson was greatly inspired by Friedrich Nietzsche and his theory that humans discover their sense of self through personal suffering and struggle. Masson's drawings and paintings, specifically from the 1930s, reflect his journey of self-discovery through vivid color and graphic imagery of distorted human figures.<sup>xxi</sup> His painting, *The Painter and the Time*, depicts a bulbous hand in the act of painting; his hand rests in front of the legs of an easel. What appears to be a window with the moon shining through is visible along the right-hand side. A few plant-like elements appear both the "the painter's" canvas and the window in the background, suggesting to me that Masson's subject is painting a scene from the window. The canvas in the painting obscures any chance of my seeing what this fictional painter sees through



the window. This leaves the question of the reality of the grotesque portrait on the painter's canvas. Is the graphically rendered face with mismatched, frightened eyes and gaping mouth something the fictional painter truly sees, a figment of the painter's imagination, or a reflection of Masson's own suffering?

*The Painter and the Time* struck me when I first saw it, not only because of its bold color and intricate symbolism, but also because of its resemblance to my piece, *Phantasm #12*. The figure in Masson's painting has what I perceive to be arms, or possibly hair, that extend from the central point of the face with serpentine motion and end in spiraling strands that form circles at the bottom corners of the displayed canvas. My *Phantasm* has two appendages that act in a similar manner to the figure in Masson's painting. Growing from a center point that appears to stem from inside the wall, and the individual tendrils spiral about as if they are seeking something. The struggle I depict in *Phantasm #12* differs from the painting in that my piece feels wilder and has a slight sense of desperation. It feels active; I want a viewer to feel the tension of the appendages busting out of the shoulder piece, ripping the strap and flailing its tendrils in all directions.

While my sculpture work represents the physical struggle of a crippling body as a direct result of a crippled mental state, *Eidola*, the novella, represents a physical manifestation of that crippled mental state.

*Eidola*, a fictional tale, is my interpretation of a gothic novel. Though it is inspired by countless, classic gothic stories, the work of authors, Mary Shelley and Henry James stand at the forefront. It is said that Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* at the suggestion of Lord Byron. Shelley, her husband, and other prominent authors of the period were vacationing together when Lord Byron suggested they all write ghost stories.<sup>xxii</sup> Shelley's Frankenstein monster is the

epitome of a tragic hero. He knows that he was born against the laws of nature and despises himself for his terrible actions. He cannot help his nature, however, and commits sins in the name of finding love and happiness. The Frankenstein monster says, “I have love in me the likes of which you can scarcely imagine and rage the likes of which you would not believe. If I cannot satisfy the one, I will indulge the other.”<sup>xxiii</sup>

The concept of a monster spliced together from the unnatural is still a contemporary gothic theme. The term “Frankenstein” or “Frankensteining” is often casually applied to anything that might be patched together haphazardly or wouldn’t ordinarily be put together at all. I use it to describe a style of welding I developed to patchwork pieces of metal together to resemble stitching, as in my piece, *“Exit the Warrior,”* which evokes the necessity to keep moving onward, even when it appears that my path is decaying before me. I call the style, “Franken-welding.” I view the stitched-together steel as a representation of how I imagine my body to be on the inside. It is not actually disjointed in such a way, but my joint condition does not allow any of my joints to operate with fluid motions. I can feel, and sometimes hear, the clicking and popping sounds of each movement I make, as if my skeleton weren’t assembled correctly.

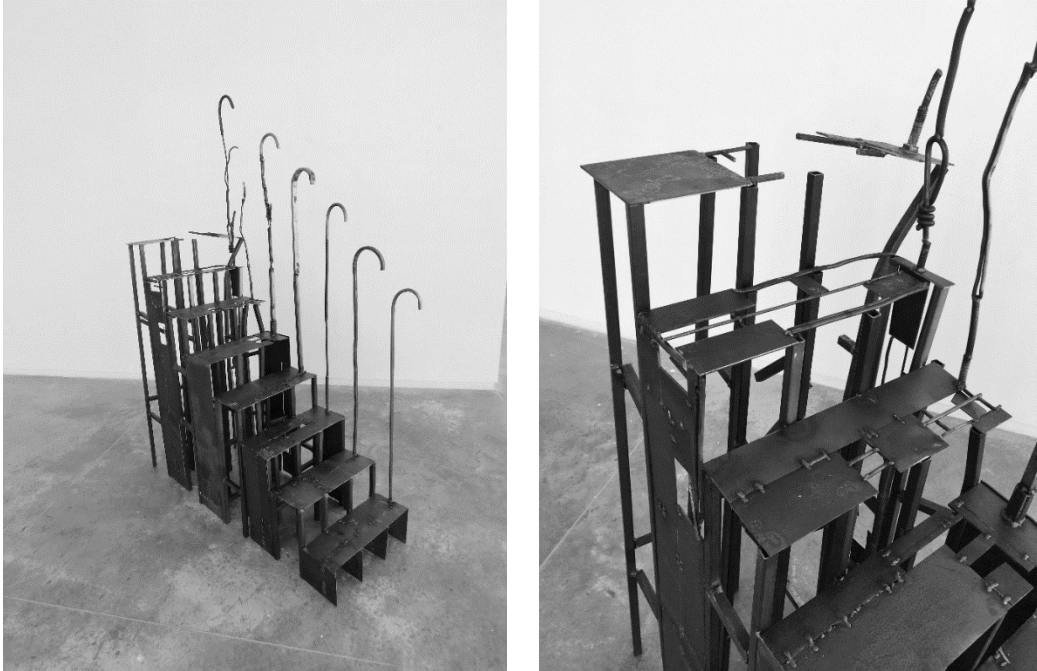


Fig. 12 “Exit the Warrior,” Steel, 2016

I brought this notion of misassembled monsters to my *Phantasms* that live within *Eidola*. *Phantasm #2* has less of a seamless transition from armor-to-appendage as the other *Phantasms*. Its armor is a set of greaves, cut off at the knee, that outline the form of a human figure. Attached where a figure’s torso or armor breastplate should be, are the wriggling tendrils of a vaguely animalistic, thing. I wanted the piece to seem obviously disjointed; the two pieces clearly don’t have the same origin, but they come together in the disturbingly alluring gesture of a contrapposto crawl.



Fig. 13 *Phantasm #2*, Steel and roofing tar, 2017

For *Eidola*, the novella, I bring the notion of physical monstrosity from Mary Shelley, but my inspiration for the psychological trauma the main character undergoes is inspired by the writing of Henry James. His novel, *The Turn of the Screw*, leaves the decision of the main character's sanity to the reader. James masters suspense in the novel by having the narrator mention that the story he was about to relate made him too frightened to sleep. The entire plot can be read differently depending on if the reader believes the demonic apparitions and possessed children are real or just the ravings of an unstable governess. I turn to gothic horror stories like the works of James when writing my own because they deliver horror in a way that doesn't rely on excessive gore. Authors of classic gothic works, such as *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James, know how to tell a story that keeps me on edge and simultaneously intrigued and terrified.

It was as if, while I took in – what I did take in – all the rest of the scene had been stricken with death. I can hear again, as I write, the intense hush in which the sounds of evening dropped. The rooks stopped cawing in the golden sky, and the friendly hour lost, for the minute, all its voice. But there was no other change in nature, unless indeed it were a change that I saw with a stranger sharpness. The gold was still in the sky, the clearness in the air, and the man who looked at me over the battlements was as definite as a picture in a frame. That's how I thought, with extraordinary quickness, of each person that he might have been and that he was not. We were confronted across our distance quite long enough for me to ask myself with intensity who then he was and to feel, as an effect of my inability to say, a wonder that in a few instants more became intense.<sup>xxiv</sup>



Fig. 14 *Eidola* Early Concept Sketch,  
Pencil on paper 2018

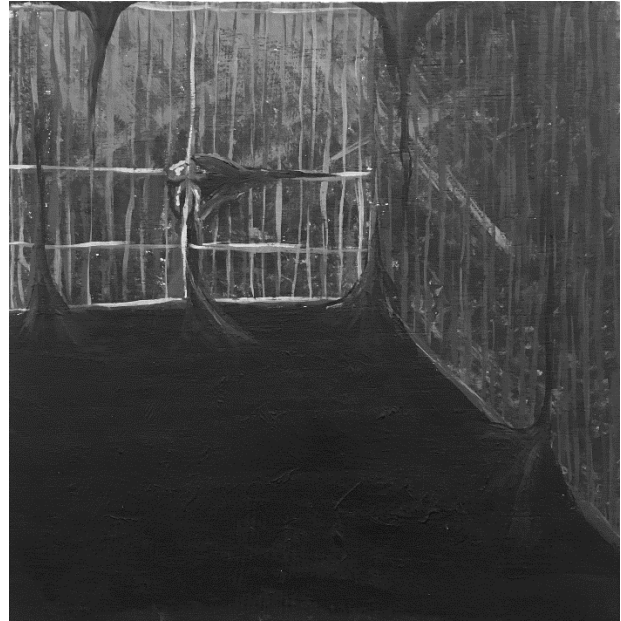


Fig. 15 *Eidola* Concept Painting  
Acrylic on wooden panel 2018

## Conclusion

In this text I describe my work in the context of my experience with emotional armoring and physical disability. I discuss my work compared to works and concepts of other artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Mona Hatoum, and André Masson. I describe my fascination with Medieval arms and armor, Goth culture, gothic novels, and how these inspire my work.

I've lived with a chronic joint illness for over six years. I was raised in a community that frowned upon imperfections and anything beyond ordinary. This left me, the wild child, and now a disabled adult, feeling the need to guard myself against everyone around me. Eventually I realized the existential armor I wore was too heavy a burden for me, physically and emotionally.

In my art practice, I've been able to uncover these memories of my past as the roots of my mental barriers and break away from them. Through the narrative quality of my painting, sculpture, and installation work, I share my story in hopes that audiences might connect with their own emotional armor and—if need be—find a way to escape it.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Owens, Susan. *The Ghost: A Cultural History*. London: Tate Publishing, 2017.

<sup>ii</sup> Half Armor. 1600. Steel with gilding, modern leather, fabric, and wax. 26 1/2 x 27 1/2 x 12 1/4 in. The Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis, <http://www.slam.org>.

<sup>iii</sup> Edge, David, and John Miles Paddock. *Arms & Armor of the Medieval Knight: An Illustrated History of Weaponry in the Middle Ages*. New York: Crescent Books, 1996.

<sup>iv</sup> Hudspeth, E. B. *The Resurrectionist: The Lost Work of Dr. Spencer Black*. Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2013.

<sup>v</sup> *Cockfeather Mask*. Rebecca Horn. Date unlisted. Feathers, metal and fabric. 610 x 150 x 330mm. Tate Art Museum, London, <http://www.tate.org.uk>.

<sup>vi</sup> Merriam-Webster Dictionary, online, s.v. "eidolon."

<sup>vii</sup> Furtado, Will. "Louise Bourgeois: The Cells of Her Senses." *Sleek Magazine*, 2015. <http://www.sleek-mag.com/2015/03/06/louise-bourgeois-structures-of-existence-the-cells/>.

<sup>viii</sup> *Cell (Three White Marble Spheres)*. Louise Bourgeois. 1993. Steel, glass, marble, and mirror. 81 3/4 x 85 1/2 x 84 1/2 in. The Saint Louis Art Museum, Saint Louis, <http://www.slam.org>.

<sup>ix</sup> *These Decades that We Never Sleep, Black Drums*. Terence Koh. 2004. Drum kit, paint, ropes from a ship found after midnight, black wax, plaster, vegetable matter, crushed insect parts, artist's blood and cum. 50 x 30 cm. and 100 x 163 x 100cm. The Saatchi Gallery, London, <http://www.saatchigallery.com>

<sup>x</sup> Leroux, Gaston, and Alexander Teixeira De Mattos. *The Phantom of the Opera*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004.

<sup>xi</sup> The following section briefly outlines my comprehension of the history of the term, "goth" from ancient Europe to contemporary subcultures.

The story begins around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century c.e. with the ancient Germanic tribes, the Goths. The major tribes were the Ostrogoths in eastern Europe and the Visigoths in the west. They fought constant skirmishes with the Roman empire over land and power. As the Romans conquered lands, they absorbed the people into their own culture and armies. The barbarous tribes, however, were only loyal to themselves and fought as mercenaries for the Roman emperor. As the empire declined, the Gothic tribes were scattered over Europe and cultures intertwined.

The end of the Roman Empire grew into the rise of the Middle Ages, or Dark Ages. This era spanned nearly one thousand years and saw a focus on morality and the expansion of Christian religions. Art and architecture shifted from the structural precision Classical style of the Greeks and Romans to a more dramatic and complex style filled with allegory, nature, elements of the sublime, and religious symbolism. The first ministry of Gothic architecture—though it wasn't called that at the time—was St. Denis monastery built in France during the 12<sup>th</sup> century c.e.<sup>xi</sup> Early 19<sup>th</sup> century Romantic poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge later said about it, "The principle of Gothic architecture is infinity made imaginable."<sup>xi</sup>

The arrival of the Italian Renaissance brought back an appreciation for the traditional Greek and Roman styles and current works were viewed as barbaric and crude. Art historian Giorgio Vasari described the style as "gothic," using it as a derogatory reference.<sup>xi</sup>

The word held on to this connotation until it was morphed slightly in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by author Horace Walpole<sup>xi</sup>. He wrote the first gothic novel, using the word to describe his own work, referring to the atmosphere it held.<sup>xi</sup> 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe was focused on scientific advances and strict on matters of church and morality. After outbreaks of the plague, the Victorian era especially held an obsession with death and mourning rituals.<sup>xi</sup> Rebellious creatives longed for the romance and idealized past of Medieval times.

The first gothic novels were received as what we consider today to be trashy romance novels. They were filled with tales of the horrors that befell anyone who acted with impropriety and succumbed to immoral thoughts and actions. They revealed possibilities of darkness within human nature and reveled in the mysterious and spiritual forces<sup>xi</sup>. They grew in popularity and became more socially accepted as literature as writers punctuated endings with a moral victory, but the subculture had already been created.

"Gothic" stood as a term for literature and poetry until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century when rebellious, anti-establishment music and fashion took an interest in the dark romance of the Victorian era and gothic writing. The word "goth" was revitalized once again and became the label for a branch of subcultures that combines the reverence of Gothic history with the excitement of an ever-changing occult world<sup>xi</sup>.

The modern Goth movement became popular in the UK during the 1980s because of the music and fashion from goth bands, specifically Bauhaus. London's Batcave club that opened in 1982, brought public attention to the underground Goth scene.<sup>xi</sup> Its elements of the occult and the uncanny are still what drives contemporary Goth culture today. The

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occult is something referencing or related to magic or the supernatural. The uncanny is mysterious or inexplicable. Both evoke things that are dark or secretive. They have an allure of the dangerous and forbidden, and the quality of the grotesque that connects the ancient pagan practices of Gothic tribes with contemporary fascinations with everything from witches to aliens to monsters.

<sup>xii</sup> Thomas, Gareth M., and Dikaïos Sakellariou. *Disability, Normalcy and the Everyday*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018.

<sup>xiii</sup> *Natura morta (medical cabinet)*. Mona Hatoum. 2012. Glassware and cabinet. 61.5 x 54 x 17.5 cm. Private collection, Sao Paulo. <http://proa.org/eng>.

<sup>xiv</sup> *Untitled (wheelchair)*. Mona Hatoum. 1998. Stainless steel and rubber. 970 x 500 x 850mm. Tate Art Museum, London. <http://www.tate.org.uk>.

<sup>xv</sup> Fineberg, Jonathan David. *Art since 1940: Strategies of Being*. Boston: Prentice Hall, 1995.

<sup>xvi</sup> *Hang Up*. Eva Hesse. 1966. Acrylic on cloth over wood; acrylic on cord over steel tube. 72 x 84 x 78 in. The Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago. <http://www.artic.edu>.

<sup>xvii</sup> Lippard, Lucy R. *Eva Hesse*. New York: New York University Press, 1976.

<sup>xviii</sup> Sontag, Susan. *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2017.

<sup>xix</sup> Williams, Anne. *Art of Darkness Poetics of Gothic*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

<sup>xx</sup> *The Painter and Time*. André Masson. 1938. Oil and sand on canvas. 116 x 73cm. Private collection, <http://www.the-athenaeum.org/art/detail.php?ID=20374>.

<sup>xxi</sup> Poling, Clark V., and André Masson. *André Masson and the Surrealist Self*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

<sup>xxii</sup> Botting, Fred. *Gothic: the new critical idiom*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2014.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Shelley, Mary Wollstonecraft. *Frankenstein*. Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2009.

<sup>xxiv</sup> James, Henry. *The Turn of the Screw*. London: Penguin, 2011.



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## Appendix

*Eidola*  
A Short Novel

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## Chapter 1: The Wedding

It began at a wedding, quite some time ago. Actually, it began adjacent to a wedding, in a room off the side of the church where the bride waits to be walked down the aisle. The room was small yet comfortable. An ancient chest of drawers occupied the space beneath the window and a tarnished, full-length mirror took up more than its share of space on the opposite wall. Crammed against the wall that faced the door sat a pristine sofa, the congregation's pride and joy. Strewn over its velvet cushions was a sickly young lady. She was glistening with sweat and her dark hair clung to her face and neck. Her eyelids were strung open like a curtain stretched taut over too long a rod. The rustle of fabric around her heaving chest blended with the muffled organ music that crept beneath the doorframe.

The music swelled and burst through the doorway behind a Mister Roger Fowley, who, carrying a glass of water, knelt by the woman's side.

"Celia?" He asked gently, pushing the strands of hair that clung to her temples from her forehead.

"Celia? Can you hear me?"

"I'm here."

The man let out a deep sigh of relief and clasped his lady's hand.

"Good. You had me worried you were still in some sort of trance."

"Not quite. I was just looking at that garish hook attached to the back of the door."

"Don't let Joanne hear you say that. It was the precious home to her wedding gown for nearly two weeks!"

Celia laughed but began to cough as she tried to sit up. Roger motioned for her to lie back against the cushions and brought the glass of water to her lips. He searched the woman's face in earnest.

"What's happened?" He asked quietly, "I've never seen you like this, not in the middle of the day with everyone around."

"I don't know," she replied, still a little out of breath, "It was different this time. I felt frozen. I couldn't move. My eyes were open, but I couldn't see a thing. All I could hear was a rushing sound in my ears until...until I heard you telling me you were going to get me some water. I felt the cushions around me and knew I was safe."

"Well thank *goodness* for that sofa."

"Thank Uncle Pontifis more likely," Celia replied sarcastically. "His donation for the sofa practically put the church fundraising group out of business."

"Ahhhh yes," Roger took on a mocking tone and stood up to straighten his collar, "Mr. Pontifis Barkclay, the father-in-law-to be." He bowed theatrically. Celia began to laugh out loud but clapped her hands over her mouth as the door swung open once again.

"Here you are! I've been looking all over. The two of you cannot sneak off in the middle of our cousin's wedding!"

"Lavender," Roger began, but Celia held up a hand and interrupted.

"It's my fault Lavie, have we missed it?"

"Not quite. If we hurry back no one will notice you were gone."

"We will," Roger nodded, "We just need a moment."

"I can't return alone. I..."

“Lavender,” Roger said much more firmly, “give your sister a minute, please.”

The elder of the sisters, recognizing the tone, turned away from the door, concerned.

“Celia are you sick?”

“I’m all right,” the young woman answered quickly. Her face struck an apologetic look.

“Do you think anyone will notice?”

Suddenly becoming very interested in her appearance, Celia began to tug relentlessly at her hair and clothes.

“*Celia*,” Roger sounded more exasperated than he intended. “Please relax,” he added in a calmer voice. “We can just sit in the back until we can take you home.”

Celia gave the man a small smile and accepted his out-stretched arm. She winced as she stood, feeling a twinge in her lower back.

“You could have worn the brace, you know,” Lavender whispered sympathetically, “I don’t think anyone would have noticed it under that dress.”

Celia shrugged and replied, “Maybe, but *she* would have noticed.” Lavender waved the notion away and took her sister’s arm.

“She doesn’t count. That woman notices people’s deficiencies as if by witchcraft!” The sisters giggled as they exited the narrow room and headed back into the church.

Roger and Celia perched discretely in a pew near the prayer candles while Lavender returned to the front. A stack of programs on an end table next to Celia distracted her.

*Announcing the marriage of William Barkclay,  
son of Pontifis & Maudline Barkclay...*

“Isn’t she a lucky one?” Celia heard one of the church ladies whisper to another, “The Barkclays are the wealthiest family in town!”

“Indeed,” the other replied, “and their daughter has paired herself with the eldest son of a banker.”

“Good, good. That family’s reputation could use a little luster after...”

“Shhhh!” the second woman hissed as she had finally noticed the presence of the couple behind them. They glowered at the pair momentarily before turning around and waving at another from their circle as if nothing had happened.

A grumpled snort emerged from Roger. Celia took the man’s hand.

“Let it go. The ceremony is almost finished.” She watched as her cousin and his lovely bride exchanged vows under the most extravagant floral archway she could imagine. This wedding had been the talk of the town for nearly a year. William’s mother, Aunt Maudline, had started making the plans possibly before her son was even born. It did not matter that they were the wealthiest family around by far; status meant everything, and that meant a constant parade of money. Her husband didn’t mind, however. Pontifis Barkclay loved to throw money at anything he saw. Fortunately, neither of their children inherited their parents’ greed or pomposity.

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William and his younger sister, Amelia, were both kind and generous people, and Celia adored them both.

When the ceremony concluded, and the procession made its way down the front steps of the church to gather before the reception, Celia and Roger snuck out behind the last of the crowd of people. Lavender caught up with the two outside.

“I looked for you,” she scolded, “You could have come sit near the front.”

“I wish we had,” Roger replied curtly. The elder sister’s eyes darkened.

“What happened?”

“It was nothing,” Celia answered quickly, grasping Roger’s arm to silence him.

Lavender eyed her sister skeptically but dropped the issue.

Celia began to notice the usual stares and voices dropping into whispers as she moved through the crowd to find her parents. It wasn’t difficult as both Raynard Pavins and his wife were rather tall. Celia’s mother pulled her aside by way of a greeting as her husband and Roger took the more traditional route of shaking hands.

“Where did the two of you slip off to during the ceremony? I had to send Lavender after you.” Celia didn’t appreciate her mother’s accusatory tone, but she didn’t feel angry. It was a tone to which she was accustomed.

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t feeling well and...” Her mother cut her off.

“Do you know how that made me look? I’ll be dodging questions for the rest of the evening. As if I wouldn’t be already.” She added the last bit under her breath, but Celia still heard it.

“I’m sorry,” the girl repeated half-heartedly, knowing her mother didn’t much care for an explanation at the moment.

More glares ensued as Lavender rejoined the group. She chatted with her mother about the various choices Aunt Maudline had made about the wedding and if she’d even given the bride and groom a say in the matter. Celia tilted her head down as if she were listening intently to their conversation, but her ears were focused on the other voices, the whispers.

At first, she couldn’t make them out. Her eyes darted about desperately, but none of the lips she saw mirrored what she heard. It seemed as though the hushed, harsh tones were scratching at her inner ears like the sound of furious scribbling on a piece of paper. It increased in volume and speed, making the young woman feel nauseated until she found the voice she’d been listening for. Everything else fell away except for the boastful caw of the woman Celia had been avoiding all day. Mrs. Matilda Kroeler, the family matriarch. She was surrounded by the usual gaggle of church ladies, including the two that were seated in front of Roger and Celia during the ceremony. Celia only caught drips of the conversation, but the topic could not be mistaken.

“...even at the ceremony?”

“Probably not...granddaughter has always been...”

“But I saw her...miscreant.”

“...such a scoundrel!”

“...him for more attention.”

“As if she hasn’t had enough!”

“Celia?” Her father was looking at her with concern. “Are you all right?” She looked at Roger, whose expression matched her father’s.

“I’d like to go home.” Roger looked about and found the group that was causing Celia so much distress.

“Let’s go.”

“Tell Mother and Lavie I said goodbye?” Celia asked as she clasped her father’s hand. The man was about to reply when a shout of, “Raynard!” came from Uncle Pontifis as he made his way over to them. Celia and Roger ducked away before either of the older men noticed. They skirted the crowd and began to travel arm-in-arm down the path that led out of town.

They escaped unseen by all the revelers except one. They were all concerned with the lucky new Mrs. Barkclay and didn’t take much notice of the groom, who was busy noticing the young couple leaving the scene. He watched them just long enough to see Roger look back and catch his eye. The two men nodded to one another, then returned to their business.

## Chapter 2: The Houses on Dolorous Lane

If you were to ascend the stairs to the loft of the old church at the center of town, you would find an artfully crafted stained-glass window, paid for by the Barkclays of course. The scene depicts two angels, twins, hovering above a crowd of sinners. One angel weeps for them, while the other extends a hand toward them. Below, demons and devils crouch at the ready to drag the crowd to the underworld. At the center of the crowd, stands one remorseful-looking figure. His hand, too, is outstretched, reaching for the angels. An orb of light surrounds his hand. The shards of glass that make up this light were left colorless, so the sunlight might shine through and illuminate the scene. A direct glance through this clear bit of glass provides the best view of Dolorous Lane, the only road that leads away from town.

All of Dolorous Lane was empty except for the houses at the far end. The Barkclays owned the landscape and kept it free of development for their own uses. In the center, facing any travelers head on, stood Barkclay Manor. It was the tallest and grandest structure in town. It was built from imported stone and adorned with a façade of intricately carved figures and animals. To the left of the manor stood the Pavins’ cottage. It was significantly smaller than the manor house but still quite large. Raynard built it for his wife and daughters after respectfully declining to let Pontifis Barkclay pay to have builders in from the city. The third house, Barkclay Hall, was still under renovation. It stood to the right of the manor house and was a wedding gift for William and his new bride.

Near the edge of the Barkclay properties, far behind the Pavins house, stood a narrow patch of forest. It was the only stretch for miles that had not been cut down. Pontifis had most of the town cleared to appease his mother-in-law. She claimed to have, “allergies,” but conveniently lost them each time she visited the Kroeler Lumber Yard.

This particular bit of forest had been saved, however, because it was home to a little cottage of its own. A few years prior when a young man came to town to work as the leather workman’s apprentice, he was granted permission to build a small house for himself among the trees. The house was quite hidden from the road. If one did not know the location of the footpath that led to the little cabin, it would never be found.

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Now, no one in town was quite sure when the younger Pavins daughter moved into the wooded cabin with young Mr. Fowley, but everyone knew how the Barkclays and, more importantly, Mrs. Kroeler, felt about it. Roger Fowley was well-liked enough, but the young couple was quite peculiar. They knew one another before Celia's mysterious accident that left her with a crook in her back and left leg. The rumor was that she'd grown jealous of her family's success and caused the injury herself. The most popular theory was that she was thrown out by her parents in disgrace and taken in by the young man. Celia Pavins was rarely seen in town and Roger never lingered too long himself. They were clear outcasts and it was difficult for them to be seen as anything else.

By the time Roger and Celia reached their home, the girl was resting heavily on Roger's arm. He lowered her onto the sofa and helped untie her boots. She laid back and folded an arm over her eyes as Roger silently retrieved a glass of water and started a fire in the hearth. As the fire lent a gentle warmth to the room, Celia sat up a little to accept the water. Roger seated himself as well, resting the woman's legs over his lap. They sat that way for a moment longer before either of them spoke. Celia placed the now-empty water glass on the floor and adjusted a pillow behind her.

"Tell me what happened...please," Roger started. He began to fiddle with a loose thread in one of the Celia's socks as he listened.

"I'm not quite sure, to be honest," she began, "I thought I was just too warm at first. My heart was racing, and I felt an odd pressure behind my eyes. That's why I told you I needed some air. I thought the room was too crowded and that I just needed to step outside. I don't remember going to lie down in the bride's room, though."

"You didn't," Roger interrupted, "I took you there after I found you slumped against the wall near the open door." Celia wrinkled her brow a little as she tried to recall the scene.

"Yes," she murmured, "that is right. I stopped just in front of the door to catch my breath. It swung open with a gust of wind. I suddenly felt as though my legs were made of lead. I didn't have the strength to lift them and my back was throbbing. I just stood there gazing out the doorway, then I saw something."

"What?"

"I'm not sure," Celia closed her eyes again and started to move her lips without speaking, searching for the words to describe what she had seen. "It was like a daydream. When you stare off into space and your mind plays through a different reality than the one in which you're standing. You can see the same old landscape in front of you, physically, but you are simultaneously locked into the scene that dances thorough your mind. Yes, it was like that, only it wasn't a dream. It was as if a nightmare was surging around me even though my eyes were open, and I could hear joyous hymns being sung behind me."

"What happened, Celia? What sort nightmare?"

"It always begins with darkness. I'm not sure if I lose consciousness, but I feel a rushing pass through my ears and into my heart. It makes my pulse pound and turn cold. Everything turns so cold. I try to open my eyes wider to let some light back in, but it's never any use. I am frozen to the core and to the ground, no longer able even to blink.

Slowly a light seeps in, but not from any of my physical surroundings. It is dim and has a sour glow to its purplish cast. I begin to feel dizzy as a haze swirls about me. It feels as if I were tossing my head back repeatedly even though I know I am standing still. The muscles in my neck clench and grow weak with the strain of fighting to steady my mind. The light continues to

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brighten enough for me to see the cage that surrounds me. The corners are shrouded in a thick mist, but I can sense that they disappear over the edge of a chasm; I can hear horrible sounds exuding from below. As I look about, the vertigo overcomes me, and I stumble. I feel the icy sting of decaying metal scrape against my arm as I fall against the wall of my cage. I struggle to raise an arm to pull myself up, but my hands and knees are stuck among whatever substance coats the walls and floor. I pull with all my strength to free one hand. I hold it in front of me to examine. It's covered in a sort of oozing plaque that's thick like tar. Even the slightest movement sinks the body further in like wet sand.

Perilously I haul myself to a stand with the wall as my anchor. It gnaws and tears at my skin, but I bite my lip and continue to pull. My body is weighed down with the undulating mucus soaking my limbs and clothes. With great effort, I raise my head and I see it."

"See what?"

"The gate. It towers high above the haze and the shadows and stands directly across from me. Its bars are twisted and mangled. It looks wilted, wounded, and the putrid matter from the floor spreads along the gate's contorted frame.

Sickened, I turn away, but suddenly I am being shoved through the grime by the cage wall itself! Slowly but fiercely I'm pushed toward the gate. I look around and notice that the other walls are also closing in. The space becomes tighter as all three walls move together to push me nearer to the gate. As I peer through its disjointed rungs, I realize that this gate is not an escape. It is only the entryway to something far worse."

The girl gulped down a breath after she'd finished. She laid back onto a pillow, exhausted. Roger patted her leg.

"Relax, it's over now."

"I'm not so sure."

"What do you mean?"

Celia searched the ceiling for the right words.

"This place in my nightmares, I can't remember a time when it didn't seem familiar. I think it is a real place." Roger took her hand.

"It was only a dream, and the memory of a dream. You wore yourself out this afternoon. That must be why the vision came back to you. Rest now." The man kissed his lady's forehead and pulled a blanket over her shoulders. He then retired to the kitchen to make up for the dinner they'd skipped at the Barkclay manor.

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The manor's main hall flooded with guests after the wedding ceremony. Maudline Barkclay had spared no expense nor detail for the decorations. Exotic bouquets hung from arched doorways. There were mountains of food and musicians perched on the first landing of the grand staircase, whose banister was draped in the finest fabrics in town. The entire room shown with elegance and finery with only one exception. Practically hiding behind a large potted plant stood one man in a noticeably less-refined suit than the rest. He looked uncomfortable and highly out of place among the rest of the guests. He looked down at the plate of food he held and scowled.

"Unimpressed?" Came the voice of a charming young lady.

"Lavender," the man smiled as his niece approached with her fiancé, James. The man dumped the contents of his plate into the plant and held a finger to his lips.



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“A stinking surprise for later,” he whispered as the other two laughed.

“Hello Uncle Ernst,” Lavender gave the man a hug and he and James shook hands.

“How have you both been?”

“Very well! We haven’t seen you in quite a while, though.” Ernst frowned.

“You know I try to avoid coming into town whenever I can.”

“I know,” the young woman answered, “I’m sure William and Joanne will be happy you came.”

“I’ll make sure I see them before I go.”

“You’re leaving already?” James inquired, surprised.

“I have to work early. I just wanted to be here for the ceremony and say hello to you all. I will probably try to find your parents in this madness before I leave,” he said, gesturing to the sea of skin and silk before them.

“If you find them before we do, warn them not to eat whatever has the green sauce on it.” Ernst chuckled, “Will do,” and separated from the couple.

In the kitchen, just off the main hall, Apatha Pavins was fussing with a number of serving trays, desperate to do something useful with her hands. Her husband was trapped in a particularly arduous conversation with Pontifis and his brothers about the construction on Barkclay Hall. Apatha was hiding, as usual, from the stares and the questions about her youngest daughter. She was contemplating how soon she and her husband could slip away without appearing rude when the most unfortunate presence appeared in the room.

Matilda Kroeler, in all her sinister glory, entered the room swiftly like a snake about to strike its prey. She had a judgmental gleam in her eye as she approached her daughter. It seemed as if she had been lurking in the doorway, watching the younger woman for some minutes.

“There you are, Apatha! She said harshly, causing her daughter to jump.

“Mother! You startled me. I’ve been in here the whole time.”

“With the *help*?” Matilda looked around the room disdainfully in a slow but fluid motion that caused the matted white poof of hair atop her head to sway independently from the dyed and fastened locks at the bottom like a bird’s nest on a weakened tree branch.

Apatha let out a sigh of her own, ignoring the question, “What did you need, Mother?”

“I was just discussing the ceremony with the Thurstons.” The woman’s tone was harsh; every syllable cut the air like ice. She paused dramatically, clearly waiting for her daughter to inquire further. Apatha said nothing. She continued to look at her mother expectantly, though she could guess where the conversation would end. Reluctantly, Matilda continued on her own.

“The Thurstons were seated at the back of the church because their grandson fell and scraped his knee on the way into town. His parents weren’t watching, of course. His father was too busy with the young widow from down the street and his wife claims to have taken ill again. I don’t know why...”

“Mother,” Apatha interrupted finally, “you’re point?”

“Well,” the old woman advanced with an ugly cross between a scowl and a sneer across her face, “the Thurstons were seated in the back of church...near your daughter.” The younger woman remained silent. Anything she said would only encourage the matriarch.

“Mrs. Thurston informed me that your youngest couldn’t help herself but make a fuss in the bride’s room.” Again, no response, although it didn’t seem to matter at this point. The

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familiar strike of self-righteousness and glee simmered at the corners of the old woman's eyes. The servers, who were used to her attitudes, suddenly found dishes to take out the nearest door.

"She just couldn't let our William have his day, could she? It's not enough for her and that serf to parade their filth around town, or for her to put on a show with that silly brace of hers. Where did she even come by that? Isn't a doctor required to provide a device like that? I'm sure she conned one into giving it to her!"

"Mother, there's no one of consequence around, not to you anyway; you can cease with the lies."

"Lies?" Matilda's voice dropped dangerously before exploding. "I'm *SURE* I don't know what you mean!"

"Mother," came the firm, quiet voice from behind the women. It startled them both into silence.

"That's enough," Ernst said sternly. He touched Apatha's arm briefly in a show of support. Matilda frowned so deeply that her eyelashes disappeared into her thick, grey brows. She lowered her voice but kept the severity.

"You let that girl of yours ruin herself and her reputation years ago. I will be damned if I let you or her ruin this family's." The old woman stormed out of the room with a great show of smoothing her skirt and hair and clamped herself onto the nearest guest.

"Why, Mrs. Bolstead, can you believe *my* grandson inspired all this celebration? He'll be the talk of the town for weeks I'm sure!"

With the cockroach of a woman gone from the kitchen, the staff began to return safely to their duties. Ernst turned to his elder sister.

"Where is Celia? I'm surprised she came at all."

"She wanted to come for William and Joanne. Roger took her home before the reception, I believe, to avoid all this." The man sighed and shook his head. Neither of them knew how to add to the gravity and general indefensibility of that statement.

"I'm heading home as well," Ernst finally piped up.

"Already?"

"It feels like I've been here for a lifetime. I saw you, I saw the kids...most of them. Tell Celia the next time they're in the city to stop by."

"I will. It was nice to see you Ernst."

The man gave Apatha a sad smile and left through the back door without a word to anyone else. Apatha watched him walk back down the lane through a window for some time before returning to her husband, all the while thinking of her youngest daughter.

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The dinner dishes done and his lady tucked comfortably into bed upstairs, Roger Fowley was having a drink and sketching aimlessly by the fire when a soft knock came at the door. A look of surprise shot across his face as he stepped aside to allow William Barkclay through the door. The men shook hands warmly, but Roger was still confused.

"What are you doing here, William? And at this hour? Shouldn't you be leaving for your honeymoon?"

“Joanne’s finishing the packing. Lav told us what happened today, and we wanted to ask after Celia,” he paused, “How is she?” Roger sat down at the table and gestured for his friend to do the same.

“She’s doing better. She’s asleep upstairs.”

“Good, good. What happened to her?”

“We’re not really sure. Things were a bit much for her today, the pain, the stale air of the church, and well, you know.” William winced when the other man said, “pain” and it did not go unnoticed.

“Don’t worry about it, friend. She was happy to see the two of you today, the happiest I’ve seen her to be with family in a long time.”

“Good,” William looked only slightly relieved, but he would have to put his dismay behind him for now. He stood.

“I hate to rush off.”

“Go,” Roger urged cheerily, “be with your wife.” An involuntary grin broke the somber hold on William’s face.

“I will. We’ll both come by after we return.”

“We’d like that.” Roger watched William hurry off toward the mansion with only a small lantern to guide him. Very few people could find their way to the little house in the dark, but William knew his father’s property well. He and his cousin Lavender knew their way to Celia and Roger’s home so well they could run there in a matter of minutes, even without much light. Uncle Ernst usually trekked the foot path as well when he came to visit, but his trips grew shorter and less frequent these days.

Roger closed the door and turned down the lamp. As he made his way up the stairs he couldn’t help but think of what Celia had said about her dream, about it staring from the darkness. Roger had always been fond of the night, of the moon and mystery that blankets the earth. But tonight, however, he felt something ominous in the air. He tried to shake it off as she climbed into bed, hoping to keep what plagued Celia’s nightmares out of his own.

### **Chapter 3: Monsters**

The evenings grew colder and the commotion surrounding Barkclay Hall slowed as the remodel came to fruition. The winter months meant stale air and attitudes and a town desperate for entertainment. And, it would seem, with the excitement of her grandson’s wedding dimming, Mrs. Kroeler felt a brand of desperation all her own.

The old woman spent most of her evenings with Mr. and Mrs. Thurston. The couple owned various businesses around town and were therefore the most knowledgeable of all the goings on. With the town in a dead spell, however, even the Thurstons’ wells had run dry. Matilda was leaving their apartment above the pharmacy unusually early that evening and came across someone she did not expect.

After the incident at the wedding, Celia kept to her home and the surrounding forest most of the time. Her sister and cousins came to visit often, and she and Roger trekked over the hill to

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the Pavins' house now and again for a meal. Normally, Celia didn't venture about town on her own, but this evening was special. Her parents had helped arrange for her to see a doctor in the city. The girl was a bit nervous about getting to the train station on her own, but she jumped at any chance she had to visit her uncle in the city. No one else knew her there. No one stared, or at least not for long, or whispered about her without bothering to hide it. She and Roger planned to move there once they'd saved enough money.

Celia cut across the church property, taking a shortcut through the trees behind the cemetery. She passed the open patch of trees where an old shed once stood and shivered, though not from the cold.

Arriving at the station, Celia seated herself on a bench. It was around dinner time and the wind a bit nasty, so the square was deserted. One at a time, street lamps were lit, and a light snow began to fall.

She was still musing about life in the city when she heard something fowl. An initial crunch got her attention. It startled the girl; she whipped her head around, sure the sound came from an alleyway behind her. Everything was quiet again for a moment before a faint scratching sound came from the same direction. Her heart began to pound as a shadow stirred amongst the darkness. A sudden chill much harsher than the weather swept over the scene as a distorted mass scuffled its way nearer. Celia gripped the handle of her luggage, preparing to swing it at whatever came near. The wind picked up and threatened to carry the girl's hat away. She reached up to grab after it, and when she looked back toward the alley, Matilda Kroeler stood just inside the shadows. Like a terrible apparition, she came at the girl and Celia was filled with an all too familiar sense of dread.

"It's late, Grandmother."

"It is," came the icy reply, "Do you often tramp the streets at night?"

"I could ask you the same."

"Don't question me, girl!" The woman bit off the end of her sentence and spat it at the girl with the next. "You parade your filth and lies around town enough. I don't need to hear it from you directly."

"You can't speak to me that way! There's no one around, Matilda. There's no one here to impress, to take note of your precious reputation. Can't you drop the act even for a moment, for family? I know my mother told you that I'm traveling to the city to see a doctor."

"I don't want to hear another word out of you!"

"You can't do it, can you? You can't let me share one moment of peace with you. Have you forgotten what happened to me?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"How could you have? How could you just force it from your mind? Why does it matter so much to you that I'm labeled a liar? Why do you care so much to have everyone look down on me?" The question hung in the air for a moment before Matilda spoke again.

"Because you are trash. You are unworthy and a ruin on this family. Your pathetic attempts for attention won't work on anyone if I have anything to say about it. You and that boy of yours are not worth the shack you live in. You are *both trash!*"

Both women were trembling, but Celia, in her weakened state, slumped back onto the bench.

"You're horrible," she whispered, but the old woman didn't hear. The train pulled up to the station and she reverted into the shadows.

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Celia's mind was numb. She'd been desperate to confront the matriarch for years but the mere thought of her produced a paralyzing anxiety Celia had never otherwise known. The sudden encounter shocked her system into a fog. Everything around her moved in slow motion. She could see the street lamps and lights from the train, but they were hazy. Muffled voices surrounded her, but she couldn't understand them. The fog grew thicker and her vision darkened. She wasn't sure if she still stood on platform.

"Hello?" She called into the mist, "Is someone there? I...I need..." Her voice caught in her throat. A deep thumping sound filled her ears, almost like a heartbeat. The clouded light shifted and melted into an ambient glow. It soured into the same dim purple Celia recognized from her nightmares.

"No," was all that managed to escape from her throat. She began to sense movement all around her. She tried to lift herself, to run, but her legs felt stuck by the same viscous substance that haunted her nightmares. All she could do was whimper as shadows took shape before her eyes. Her vision was blurred further but she could still glimpse the mutated phantasms that surrounded her. She could hear the scuffling of their many limbs as they closed in on her. In a wave of terror, the girl broke an arm free of the sludge and found her voice.

"No!" she cried out, frantically batting an arm at the shadows before her. "Leave me alone! I won't let you take me!" Celia's body grew weaker and her voice hoarse she battled the ghostly monsters. In one final attempt to escape the slithering clutches, the girl let out a hoarse growl with the remaining air from her belly and put all her strength into the force of a bite. She clamped her teeth on one of her adversaries and did not let go until it shook her off with a fierce gargle and sharp hiss. Drained, Celia felt herself collapse against the putrid floor. She could feel the monsters scuttling over her limp body as she slipped into unconsciousness.

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The following morning dawned grey and overcast. spurts of rain dropped at the most inconvenient times as the town went about its morning routine. Around midday, Roger Fowley was in the square running an errand for his employer when a shout came from across the street.

"Roger!" Lavender Pavins dashed into the street, nearly crashing into the market clerk.

"Hey, watch where you're going!" The man called angrily.

"Sorry!" Lavender called back, already halfway across the road. The clerk watched her for a moment as she straightened up, rubbing his forearm. It was heavily bandaged but still leaking from a fresh and ugly wound.

Lavender was out of breath when she reached Roger. Her earnestness caused him concern.

"What is it, Lav?"

"I've been looking for you. William just sent word."

"About what?"

"It's Celia. She never got on the train last night."

"What do you mean?"

"Something happened. I'm not..."

"Is she hurt?"

"I don't think..."

"Where is she?"

"William said they took her to the manor house."

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Without another word, Roger sprinted away from Lavender toward the house. The young lady followed, knowing it was pointless to ask him to wait.

The pair was met in the main hall of Barkclay Manor by a small crowd. The Pavinses were there of course and the Barkclays. William was at work, but Joanne was there, trying to pass around glasses of water. Celia's parents were in an intense discussion with Maudline, Pontifis, and the town's best doctor. Amelia Barkclay appeared to be explaining things to Lavender's fiancé, James, as she accepted a beverage from Joanne. The air was tense. Lavender and Roger made for them first.

"Amelia, what's happened?" The girl looked distressed.

"They brought her here last night. She was unconscious, ghostly pale, and soaked through from snow and sweat too."

"She collapsed while waiting for the train?"

"Well," Amelia glanced at Roger uncertainly.

"What, Amelia?" Roger asked with impatience in his voice.

"Well she had a sort of fit, I guess."

"You saw it?" Lavender guessed from her cousin's expression.

"It started to snow so my mother asked me to meet Grandmother in town and walk her home. I saw a crowd around the train platform. Grandmother was standing back from the crowd near an alley, so I went to see what she was doing there." The girl paused.

"Amelia, please!"

"I'm sorry," she sobbed, "It was horrible. I heard the most awful shriek. I swear I felt my blood freeze to the core. I turned and saw Celia on the ground, screaming. A fog had rolled in; I don't think she could see. I'm not sure what attacked her, but her eyes had the most horrified look to them. She flailed about violently until she finally fainted."

"Why didn't they take her to the hospital?" James asked pragmatically.

"Everyone was afraid to touch her. I heard someone say they thought she was possessed. Matilda told them to bring her here, that it was a family matter to deal with."

"To deal with?" Lavender scoffed, "I'm sure they were happy to send her down here, away from the rest of town."

"I need to see her." Roger moved to make his way up the stairs. Matilda appeared at the top of them. She descended dramatically, her long skirt flowing behind her like a tail.

"That isn't a good idea," she said coldly.

"Mother," Apatha implored, "Let the boy see Celia."

"No. She's asleep now, and I'm not sure it's wise for anyone to interact with her."

"What does that mean?" Lavender asked, suspiciously.

"The doctor and I have decided that it's for her own good to be left alone at the moment." The old woman glared expectantly at the doctor.

"Yes," he added quickly, "we don't want to agitate her again by waking her. Best let her rest for now."

"With all due respect, Matilda," Raynard Pavins interjected, "but Celia is our daughter."

Maudline said gently, "Let's let her sleep today. You can stay here for the night and see her in the morning." Celia's parents agreed.

"No," Roger said angrily, "I won't accept that. We don't have to wake her; I just need to see that she's alright." Matilda descended the remaining stairs with surprising speed to block his path.

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“Young man, I am the head of this family, one of which you have no part. You will do as I say, or you will not be welcome.” Roger looked around furiously for support, but everyone stood silent. Lavender looked frustrated but placed a hand on the man’s shoulder.

“It’ll be alright, Roger,” she whispered. “Go home and pack some of Celia’s things for her. James and I will stay here tonight as well and keep an eye on *her*.” She darted her eyes toward Matilda as she said, “her,” so that only Roger could see. He sighed, “Come pick up some of her things later, will you? I’ll be back in the morning.”

Without acknowledging anyone further, Roger turned on his heel and left the manor. He knew he wouldn’t get any sleep, but he trudged the path to his and Celia’s home, all the while wondering what could have caused the dreadful episode.

The following morning, just as dawn crept over the trees surrounding the small cottage, Roger Fowley was already on his way to Barkclay Manor. He hadn’t slept at all but wandered the grounds all night. When birds started to chirp their morning songs, the young man out up the hill toward the manor.

He hesitated for a moment as he stood at the front gate. It hadn’t been opened yet this morning, oddly. Roger stared up at the massive house as if he were seeing it for the first time again. The place was so cold. It didn’t look remotely inviting, despite all the parties the Barkclays threw there. He couldn’t imagine what it had been like to grow up in that house for Amelia and William, or even their mother and her siblings. Roger had never met Mr. Kroeler, but the Pavinses always said that Mr. Kroeler was the one who kept Matilda in check. He hated the thought of Celia staying in that house any longer than was necessary. He’d spent the entire night running through what to say to the Barkclays; he knew the most about caring for Celia, and that she needed to have her say about where she stayed while recovering. He regretted letting Lavender leave the cottage with Celia’s things. He should have just insisted that they bring her home as soon as she woke.

As Roger ascended the stairs that led to the Manor’s massive front doors, he noticed that the butler who usually admitted visitors wasn’t standing at his post. Roger looked around the courtyard. It was strangely quiet. There were normally a handful of maids and cleaning staff about at this hour, preparing for the day. Roger noticed that the newspaper delivery boy hadn’t even been by yet. Something was surely amiss; it made Roger uneasy. He went to open one of the great doors for himself, but found it locked. He yanked at it again, causing a ruckus that finally got some attention.

Maudline Barkclay appeared at the door, or rather, her head did. When she saw who was standing on the steps, she inched her body little by little into the miniscule space between the two door panels. It was as if she were afraid something, or someone, would try to rush by her if she left any room between herself and the wood.

“Roger,” she sighed dramatically and made an annoying “cluck” sound with her tongue that was probably supposed to convey sympathy. Roger did not have the patience for this.

“Why is the door locked?”

“Mother decided to keep everyone away for a while. We don’t want others gawking at our private family business. I’m sure you understand.”

“What business? Maudline, did something happen during the night?”

“Don’t you worry. Celia is in good hands. Why don’t you just go on home and we’ll send word if she’s up for visitors.” Roger tensed. The woman’s tone was far too meek and polite.

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“Can I speak with Mr. or Mrs. Pavins, please?” He asked, trying to keep his composure.

“Not right now; they’re upstairs with Celia.”

“What about Lavender? Can I see her?”

“That’s up to her,” Maudline replied in a voice that clung to the air like a damp rag.

“We sent her home last night. Mother thought it best that she rests there.”

With that, Maudline closed the door, and the sound of the lock echoed in Roger’s ears. If Lavender wasn’t at the manor house, who would look after Celia? The girls’ parents were both chronic pacifists and of no use when it came to dealing with Matilda.

Roger sprinted to the Pavins home. He raced to the front door and banged on it hard.

“Lavender? Lav, I know you’re here!” It was still early but Roger didn’t care. He was about to knock louder when James opened the door.

“Stop shouting; you’ll wake everyone in town.”

“I didn’t expect to see you here this early, James.”

“I helped Mr. Pavins bring Lavender home. I volunteered to stay with her while her parents went back to the manor.”

“What happened?” Roger asked, feeling a little guilty about pounding at the door.

“Come with me,” James replied, leading the way to Lavender’s room, “I’d better let her tell you.”

The door to the bedroom was open. Lavender was dressed and seated at a desk beneath a picture window that looked out to the backyard. She looked up at the men as they entered with a pale face and rings beneath her eyes. She did not wait for them to be seated in the arm chairs by the fireplace before speaking.

“I’m sorry I didn’t come back last night.” Roger stayed silent. He could see that Lavender was distressed, but he found it difficult to be sympathetic at the moment.

“I spent the whole afternoon begging to see Celia. I thought I might be able to talk her down from whatever was the matter. The doctor moved her to a different room after she woke up. Some people from town came to the door to ask after her, or so they claimed.”

“What do you mean?”

“A few of them were there at the train station. They were worried about letting Celia wander around after throwing a fit like that. Somehow, Matilda convinced them that Celia wasn’t really sick, she was just acting out to cause a spectacle. Most of them believed her, but a few of them were afraid she might be dangerous. She bit the store clerk.”

“What?”

“I don’t think she meant to, or, she didn’t know it was him. From what Amelia said, it sounded as if Celia didn’t know where she was or who was around her.”

“Why isn’t she at a hospital? Are the Barkclays doing anything?”

“Matilda had a doctor come in,” James answered.

“Why did they send you home?”

Lavender looked as if she could burst into tears.

“They finally let me see her,” she wailed, “They took her to another room where she could be more isolated, ‘to rest.’”

“Or to keep her away from prying eyes,” James chimed in scornfully. Lavender continued,

“Matilda walked me down the long hallway to a corner of the house I don’t know if I’ve ever seen. She unlocked a door at the end of the hallway that led to a little room. All the



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furniture had been removed except for a saggy bed in the corner. Celia was sitting at the edge of the bed in the same clothes she'd been wearing the night before."

"They've locked her in?" Roger shouted, rising to his feet.

"It might be for the best," Lavender uttered through her tears. "She looked up at us when we entered, but she just looked right through me. I reached a hand out and repeated her name to get her attention, but she slapped it away and began to scream at me. She screamed so loud, but she wasn't saying anything coherent. She threw herself onto the floor and began writhing around as if trying to squirm out of something's grasp." Lavender heaved a great sob and put her face in her hands. James reached over and took one of her hands.

"Lav was so upset that Matilda needed help getting her back down the stairs after locking Celia's door and sending for the doctor. The Barkclays and the Pavinses decided it best if we brought her here."

"Where was William during all of this?" Roger demanded.

"He was called out of town on business a few days ago. Joanne went with him; they won't be back for weeks. I promised to keep them updated and send word when Celia's doing better." Roger took his coat from the back of chair and began to put it on.

"Where are you going?" Lavender asked,

"I have to go back up there."

"Roger, they won't let you in."

"Don't you understand," he asked, "Celia has no allies in that house. How can they expect her to recover when no one in that house truly knows her? I'm going back and I'm getting into that room." James stood but Roger held up a hand,

"I'll let myself out," he said. Roger swept through the house and made the trip back to Barkclay Manor at a run.

## Chapter 4: Eidola

It was just light when Celia woke. There was a small window in the wall opposite her that appeared to have been hastily boarded up, but a knot in the wood had fallen out and a bit of daybreak peered through. The young woman was curled up like a cat on the floor. Every bit of her body was stiff. Slowly and with heroic effort, she inched herself straight. The groans from the floor beneath her echoed those from her muscles and joints.

Finally, in a semi-upright position, Celia looked around the room. She didn't recognize anything, or rather, there wasn't anything to recognize. The room was entirely empty, except for an old bed in the corner. There were two doors on adjacent walls; they looked oddly familiar.

"The manor house," Celia croaked, her memories of the previous evening returning. She felt dizzy, her mind still felt a little foggy. Just then, someone turned the knob of the door opposite the window. The Barkclay family doctor appeared with a painfully cheery grin across his face. Behind him, stood Matilda Kroeler.

"Hello, young lady!" The doctor's voice echoed in the empty room, "We thought we heard you moving about in here. How are we feeling this morning?"

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“Confused.”

“Well, that doesn’t surprise me. You had quite an episode last night.”

“An episode?”

“Yes, but don’t worry about things yet, not until we know that there’s something to worry about. I’d like to run some tests before you have breakfast if that’s all right.” He left the room without waiting for a reply. Celia and Matilda were left alone.

“Why am I here?” Celia finally asked.

“We can keep an eye on you here.”

Celia eyed the woman suspiciously as she continued.

“I don’t know what you planned to accomplish with that little display. You are lucky you weren’t arrested. You should be thanking me for convincing the police to bring you here.”

“Thanking you?” Celia interrupted, “For what? You just stood there. That fog rolled in and those, those creatures attacked me!” Matilda’s face wore the shock of someone who’d been slapped.

“I will not be spoken to that way in my own house!”

Anger gave Celia the strength to rise to her feet, but before she could retort, the sound of shouting drifted up the stairs and down the long passage to her room.

“Go home, son!”

“You have to let me see her, please!”

“You’ve no right to her. This is a family matter!”

“*I’m* her family!”

“No, you’re not! You’re not her husband; you’re not even engaged. You’re lucky the Pavinses don’t kick you off their land. Get out!”

Celia moved for the door, but the old crone stood in her way.

“Let me see him,” the girl ordered.

“No. It’s not in anyone’s best interest.”

“You don’t care about anyone’s interests but your own. Let me through. Roger!” Celia yelled, but Matilda slammed the door shut and pressed Celia back. The girl swooned and fell to the floor. Seething, she looked at the old woman, but her words stuck in her throat.

From the corner of her eye, Celia saw something scuttling across the floor. It was much too large to be an insect, and it undulated more like a snake after its prey. She recognized the slurping sounds that came from the same direction but was too afraid to look at what lurked there. She heard Matilda’s voice,

“What are you staring at. Are you even listening to me? Don’t think you can ignore me by pretending to have another fit!”

Celia wasn’t listening. The same terrible fog from the previous evening began to seep from every crack in the walls and floorboards. It clouded her vision and stuck in her throat. The wet, gurgling sounds of more creatures surrounded her. She could feel them nip at her legs and slither over her hands and feet. She dove about the room, trying desperately to dodge them. It didn’t seem to matter, however. Soon, she felt the damp heft of some phantasm on her back. She tried to roll away from it, but the thick, sticky substance began to ooze through the pores in the floor and fester along her arms. She pulled with all her might, but her body just sunk further into the viscous grime. Celia felt the creatures’ presence about to consume her when a sharp pain stung the side of her neck. Everything turned black and the fog enveloped her remaining senses.

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Celia awoke this time with the uncanny sense of the familiar. Again, she felt she could not move her body. She was fearful of opening her eyes. She shifted a little and as she did, something icy tore against her back and upper arms. With a cry of shock and pain her eyes sprung open. What lay before her was the all-too familiar landscape of her nightmares, though she knew she was wide awake.

There was no fog this time, but the same horrible ambient glow from nowhere illuminated a sour and wounded cage. Its grotesque bars rose like pillars of ancient tyranny to a roof that expelled the same viscous substance that covered the floor. As she slept, the muddy mass had spread over her limbs, plastering her to the floor and cage wall. It smelled metallic and as the brownish-black smut ebbed into her pores, she could envision it fusing with her blood and organs, rusting her from the inside.

She sat still that way for a moment, picturing her slow decline into the goo that overcame her. She thought she heard Matilda's voice from somewhere, but she felt it was just a dream, a memory.

"Is this what you wanted?" She asked the memory drowsily, "Do you hate me this much that you would lock me away in this cage until I become the nothing you always thought I was?" The memory did not reply, of course, but Celia's question did spark a different memory, an ominous one.

"The gate," she whispered. In her nightmares, the cage always had a gate. Newly determined, Celia peeled herself from the floor, ignoring the burning scrapes of the frozen metal as it tore at her skin.

"Maybe," her mind said to her, "the gate is a test, a trick of sorts. Maybe it only looks frightening to keep me from trying to exit through it."

She inched her way over the cage floor, trudging slowly through the muck, to the one wall that was shrouded in darkness. As she approached, a cold wash of dread spilled over her. The gate loomed before her, stretching higher than the ceiling of the cage itself. It was impossible to see clearly in the darkness, but Celia knew its mangled features by touch.

Shivering from chill and fear, Celia placed a hand on one of the bars apprehensively. When nothing happened, she felt encouraged. She pulled her other hand out of the grime and clasped another icy post. Forcefully, she pulled herself onto her feet. She pushed her full weight against one side of the massive door, but it made no difference. Locked or not, the gate was too heavy to open.

Celia's terror grew but so did her resolve. She wanted nothing more than to get away from its terrible magnitude. She crouched sideways, between two rungs, leaving one arm and one leg on the ground for balance. Then, with all the force she could muster, Celia pushed the two rungs apart. Their dilapidated state weakened them just enough to succumb to her strength.

Still shivering and covered in sweat and grime, Celia squeezed through the gap and crawled into the empty black pit beyond the cage.

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The weeks passed along with the snow. It was still winter, but the days were uncharacteristically warm. A persistent downpour hung over the town, blocking out the sun for days. Roger tried to keep occupied with work. He ran errands for his employer during the day, spending most of his evenings with James, glad for the company. At night, Roger often skulked around the grounds of Barkclay Manor, scaling any wall he could and peering in windows. Matilda and the Barkclays still would not let him in to see Celia. They insisted her condition was getting worse and that she was in no shape for visitors.

On one such evening, Lavender went to visit her fiancé and his companion. James occupied the only leased apartment in the building, so the young woman entered without knocking. The two men stared at her as she sank into an armchair, her face grave.

“Did you come from the manor house?” James asked gently, rising to pour her a drink.

“Yes,” she replied, pouring the beverage down her throat without even glancing at its contents.

“Did they let you see her?” Roger asked impatiently, his eyes rimmed with fatigue and desperation.

“No,” Lavender said quietly. She stared down at her hands. “Uncle Pontifis said she’s gotten worse. The doctor told him Celia doesn’t seem to know where she is. She’s been feverish when she sleeps, having fits, flailing about.”

Roger pounded his fist on the table near his seat, rattling their drinking glasses.

“It isn’t good for her to be there! *They* are making her worse.” James rested a comforting hand on his friend’s shoulder.

“She’ll be all right, Roger. You just need to have faith.” Roger looked up as Lavender nodded, absent-mindedly fiddling with the small golden cross around her neck.

“James,” Roger said wearily, “You know I don’t really...”

“I mean,” James interrupted with an encouraging smile, “Have faith in your girl. She’ll remember her own strength before the end of this.”

Roger nodded, “She’s stronger than she thinks she is, but I can still help her get out from under Matilda’s influence.”

“How?” Lavender asked, “They won’t even let you in the house.”

Roger told his friends what he’d been up to every night for the last few weeks.

“What are you thinking to do, break in?” James asked sarcastically?

“Yes,” Roger replied frankly. Ignoring their looks of protest, he asked quickly, “Lav, is there anywhere in the manor house that is more secluded than the rest? Anywhere Matilda may have locked Celia away and convinced the others it was for her own good?” Lavender thought for a moment.

“Well, when we were kids, our grandparents held parties all the time. Any of their friends from out of town stayed in their own guest wing toward the back of the house.”

“That must be where Celia is staying. Matilda hasn’t thrown a party since Mr. Kroeler died. They’ve had no use for the rooms.” Roger stood.

“Are you sure about this?” Lavender frowned with concern. “What if you can’t take care of her?”

“Do you really think she is better off alone in that house? You and I both know Matilda doesn’t empathize with anyone...I don’t think she can. All the doctors in this town do anything she asks just to keep her out of their offices. I should have gotten Celia away from her years ago.”

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“Where will you go?”

“To the city for now. I’m sure Ernst will let us stay with him for a while and he probably knows someone who can help me find work.”

“Will you go tonight?”

“No, tomorrow. I have some things to take care of first.”

“Take care of it then,” James stood, “We’ll get train tickets for you in the morning. You shouldn’t be seen purchasing those. You know how folks in town talk.” The men shook hands.

“Will you let me see her before you go?” Lavender whispered. Roger took her hands and pulled her to her feet.

“Of course. Meet us at the train station at midnight. I wouldn’t take her without saying goodbye, Lav.”

“Thank you,” she kissed his cheek. Roger waved his hand in thanks and left. He didn’t have much time to get his plans in order.

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Celia couldn’t be sure how long or far she’d traveled outside the cage. She moved further away from it, down what felt like a path, but the cast of the phantasmagoric light only illuminated so much of her surroundings. No matter which direction she walked, or stumbled, or crawled, no other light source revealed itself. Celia’s eyes began to play tricks on her. Even if she shut them tight, colors and shadows danced around, mocking her. They made her feel sick; she vomited. She crawled around, slowly feeling her way over the ground and trying to get her bearings. It was impossibly dark.

At one moment, Celia contemplated returning to the cage. It was dreadful, and horrified her, but at least she would be able to see. There was the tiniest bit of comfort in the thought of something familiarly terrifying. Unintentionally, she veered from the path. As she stepped away from it, her feet sunk into the same muck that inhabited the cage. Surprised, she stumbled and fell to her hands and knees. Now on all fours, the girl felt her way along the ground, thinking if she could just follow the solid path, it must lead her somewhere.

Suddenly the path seemed to have disappeared. She must have ventured further from it than she thought. Panicking, she scrambled about furiously. Her breath came in short bursts as she dragged her limbs through the grime. She wandered for what felt like days, telling herself she was moving in a straight line, although she knew there was no way to know for sure.

Celia moved in this manner until her knees and wrists grew too weak to carry on. She sat back on her ankles to give her arms a rest and blinked hard. It was difficult to tell when her eyes were open or shut in all this dark. She kept reminding herself to blink and moisten her eyes. She dared not touch her space with her mucky hands.

Celia was using a clean spot of sleeve to scratch her nose when she heard something moving toward her. Her eyes bulged in horror and in a desperate effort to see what was coming for her. The gurgling sounds of something creeping its way through the muck grew louder. She thought she’d escaped the monsters near the cage; had they followed her? She tried to stand, to run but her feet were stuck. She bent to pull at them when something knocked her over. The vial, slurping, gurgling sounds grew louder and closer. Soon, the gore of sinister tendrils rolled over her skin. Feverishly, the girl struggled against whatever invisible demon had a hold on her until she was so exhausted all she could do was fall back, listening to the horrid sounds around

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her. Closing her eyes did no good. It only made her picture what sort of grotesque phantasms could be lurking around her. She lay on the ground, soggy grime coating her back, sweat soaking her front.

Celia felt herself slipping away, wondering if this was what Matilda had planned. Was she meant to waste away here in this abhorrent graveyard of monsters and despair? She slipped in and out of fits of consciousness. Occasionally, Celia thought she heard voices. They sounded familiar, but she couldn't recognize the voice or make out any of the words. Eventually she stopped struggling against the creatures that came for her. They gnawed and punctured and clung to her limp body, but all she could do was try to will them away. She grew colder and weaker. She was completely alone in the face of dark and empty horrors. As her mind drifted, she thought she heard a new voice, one she understood completely.

"Celia," the voice called her name. It was so familiar, so comforting, but she couldn't quite recall...

"Celia," the voice called again, "Come on, Celia. Just let it go. Your grandmother doesn't have to control you. Let her go." Suddenly, the girl was filled with fire and energy.

"Roger?" She called, "Is that you? I'm trapped in here! Roger?"

He couldn't hear her, but he kept calling her name, and it was enough. Celia pulled herself to a kneeling position, rested a moment, and then stood. The monsters near her went wild. She heard them scurrying about and drawing more of them to her. They attacked with renewed force but so did the girl. She kicked and punched, scratched and bit. Anything she could reach, she pummeled. She thought she heard her grandmother's voice, ridiculing her, but Celia didn't care anymore. She forced herself free of the mob formed by the creatures around her and turned to face them.

"You don't own me!" She screamed herself hoarse at their advancing shadows, "I am not afraid!"

Light suddenly burst through the girl's vision, blinding her. The surprise of it knocked her to the floor. Keeping her sensitive eyes shut against the light, Celia felt out her surroundings. She felt hard floor, wood, she thought. She felt her arms and hair. There was no trace of the gruesome sludge. Something solid was behind her, a bed perhaps? She ventured a peek with one eye. Celia was back in the little room in the guest wing of the manor house. The light that nearly blinded her was moonlight. Someone had broken through the boards on the window to reveal the clear night sky and a full moon.

"Celia?" Roger's voice was cautious, out of concern or fear Celia couldn't tell. Maybe it was both. She turned to look at him.

"How did you get in?" Her voice was hoarse and squeaked a little.

"I climbed through the window," Roger replied as if it had been the easiest thing in the world. Celia smiled at him and rushed to hug him.

"You came for me?"

"Of course. I tried to come sooner but they wouldn't let me see you. Matilda's had you locked away in here for weeks." Celia nodded but didn't reply. Her head swam a bit.

"Can you walk?" Roger asked. Celia looked at him, confused.

"Lavender and James are meeting us at the train station. Here," he handed her a bag with clothes and shoes in it. He busied himself with a rope ladder at the window that hooked under the sill. When Celia was dressed and tied back her matted hair, Roger took the bag from her and made sure the ladder was secure.

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“Climb down. I’ll hold this in place and follow you when you’ve reached the ground.” Silently, Celia did as she was told. Her limbs were weak and shaky, but she could worry about that later. She watched from the ground as Roger rolled up the ladder into the bag, slung it over his shoulder and climbed down the side of the manor using hand and footholds in the stone. The couple looked around carefully to make sure there was no sight of anyone. As they headed for the train station, all Celia could do was stare up at the moon.

## Chapter 5: Truths

Earlier that same evening, William and Joanne Barkclay rode a train back into town. They’d decided to end William’s business trip early when Lavender finally reached them with news of Celia’s condition. William stared out a window at the rolling landscape and wondered anxiously if he was making the right decision. Joanne squeezed his hand.

“You’re doing the right thing.” She smiled up at her husband reassuringly.

“Are you sure?” He asked, “It took so long for me to tell you. You don’t think any less of me?”

“It was a long time ago, but you’re trying to make it right. I can’t fault you for that.”

Their train arrived early the next morning at an eerily empty platform. There was no one in sight of the town square. They walked over to the ticket booth.

“Morning Mr. Barkclay, Mrs. Barkclay,” said the woman standing at the counter.

“Good morning, Doris. Pretty quiet morning, huh?” Joanne asked.

“Oh!” Doris replied excitedly, “Yes! Practically the whole town’s over at the manor house.”

“What?” William and his wife exchanged worried glances, “What for?”

“I’m not sure, Mr. Barkclay. I was just asked to hold down the fort. Something’s going on up there. I’m sure they’ll be glad you’re home.”

William and Joanne left their bags at the station, not wanting to waste time, and raced to Barkclay Manor as quickly as they could.

They arrived at the house to see the gate and front doors wide open. There were people and shop owners from town gathered around the front steps and going in and out of the entry hall. The couple pushed their way through the crowd to get inside. They spotted the Barkclays and Pavinses surrounded by more people from town and a few police officers. Lavender and James sat off to the side near the kitchen. At the center of the group stood the family doctor and Matilda. No one noticed William and Joanne at first, so they moved closer to hear Matilda over all the noise.

“We’re just so worried, beside ourselves.”

“Where could they have gone?” Asked a man who ran a landscaping business.

“We don’t know. No one knows very much about that young man or what kind of family he has. They don’t have much money and we have no way to reach them. I’m just so afraid of what trouble they might get into.” William heard Lavender scoff and moved closer to where she sat.

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“What’s going on?” William asked quietly. Lavender looked relieved when she saw him.

“I’m glad you’re back. Celia and Roger left town last night. Our grandmother is putting together a search party. She’s terrified Roger will corrupt her beloved granddaughter,” Lavender said sarcastically.

“Why don’t you seem worried? Can Roger look after her on his own?”

“He’ll do better than anyone was here. Don’t worry,” she added, “James and I helped them go.”

“How did she seem?”

“Better than the last time I saw her. I think she just needs to free of this town, maybe even this family. They aren’t good for her.”

“I know,” William sighed, “And that’s partly my fault.”

Before Lavender could reply, William moved to the center of the room to where Matilda was still gathering more of the sympathetic to hear her histrionic speech.

“I know my sweet girl can’t have gone too far,” she was saying, “She needs to be back home with us, she needs a lot of help, you know.”

“Stop, Grandmother,” William said, standing next to her to face the crowd. The others quieted, surprised to see him, and listened.

“Just leave them be. Celia needs to be left to herself, to be around people who don’t treat her like something she’s not.”

“William,” Pontifis warned.

“No,” the young man replied firmly, “This has gone on long enough.” He turned to the onlookers.

“There is no need to go after Roger and Celia. I’m sorry we bothered you so early in the morning. Please go back to your businesses. My family will happily compensate you for any time and business lost.” A murmur arose, and everyone looked at him, confused.

“Isn’t she ill?” Someone asked from the back of the room, “Or is this another one of her acts?” William looked at his wife, who nodded, and then at Lavender who guessed what he was doing. She smiled gratefully.

“No,” William raised his voice so everyone could hear. “Celia never pretended anything. Her accident was real; it was my fault. She and the rest of my family have been covering it up to protect me.” Maudline was about to protest, but someone held up a hand to silence her.

“Go ahead, son.”

“It happened eight years ago,” William began, “My friends and I used to sneak into that old shed on the church property to drink and gamble.” There was a cluck of disapproval from someone in the crowd.

“One night, I lost a lot of my father’s money, so much that I didn’t think I could ever pay him back. I let my fear and anger get the best of me.” William paused, shaking his head in shame. “After my friends left, I set fire to the shed. Celia was taking a walk, I guess, and saw the smoke. She saw me inside and tried to help me put out the flames. It was too late. Two beams fell from the ceiling and struck her, crushing her leg and injuring her back. I carried her to the house where our doctor,” he nodded toward the man standing next to Matilda, “did everything he could to help her, but she’ll likely suffer from those injuries for life.”

The group stood in stunned silence. The woman who ran the library, one of Maudline’s closest friends, finally spoke.



“Surely this isn’t true?” She looked at the Barkclays gravely.

“It is,” William replied quietly, “Father purchased the sofa for the church as payment for the priest’s silence.”

The woman gasped, “Mr. Barkclay?”

Pontifis hung his head. “I thought I was doing what was best for my family. We all did.”

William turned to Matilda. “I can’t believe I let you convince me that hiding the truth was the right thing to do.”

Matilda’s face wore an extravagantly appalled expression.

“I never!”

“You can’t even admit it, can you?” Lavender asked heatedly. “All you care about is your precious reputation and the status of this family. You’d risk anything for it, even if it means telling lies and turning everyone against one of your own grandchildren in favor of another!”

“Enough!” Matilda seemed to grow taller with rage. Her lips contorted, and her eyes bulged with rage and a twinge of jealousy. “Everything I have done for this family was to protect its reputation. That’s the way I was raised. All I have ever done is make sure nothing holds my family back. You should all be grateful I’ve kept this family from scandal as much as I could. I will not let anyone take our status from me!”

“But at what cost, Mother?” Apatha practically whispered. “Does your reputation mean so much to you that you would sacrifice the respect of your own family for the opinions of strangers?”

“Yes.”

Without another word, Matilda turned away and ascended the staircase. The crowd exited quickly, offering shuffled goodbyes and awkward handshakes until only the Pavinses and Barkclays remained.

“She’s right,” William said. His family looked over at him with surprise. “Matilda has never done anything out of character. She’s only obsessed with her social standing because it’s all she’s ever known. It’s all she has.”

“But that doesn’t make it right,” Amelia added, “Are you suggesting we just accept that about her?”

“No. We can’t expect her to act any differently if we go on like we have. We can’t just tolerate her behavior anymore.”

“Don’t you think it’s too late for her to change?” James asked, rising to his feet.

“I don’t know.”

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## Chapter 6: Return

It ended at a wedding. Actually, it ended just before a wedding, on a beautiful spring morning, with everyone waiting on the back lawn of the Pavins' home. Raynard and Apatha Pavins stood alongside Maudline and Pontifis Barkclay, welcoming all the guests from town and some that traveled in from the city. William and James stood near the bar, talking with Uncle Ernst.

"So, she just left, permanently?" Ernst asked.

"So it seems. We didn't see her until the next morning. She came down the stairs acting as if nothing had happened and announced that she was going to stay with her sister."

"Well, I heard our aunt was sick; maybe she asked Matilda to take care of her."

"I can't believe anyone would invite Matilda anywhere," James said, chuckling. Apatha waved at them.

"I guess we should take our places; looks like we're starting soon."

"I'll go tell the girls," William offered and went inside the house.

He knocked on Lavender's bedroom door. Lavender answered, looking a bit frantic.

"Oh," she said, "I hoped you were Celia."

"She isn't here?"

"She was earlier," Amelia said, "She left for a minute but didn't say where."

"I hope she's all right." Joanne started to get up from her seat, but William put a hand on her arm to stop her.

"You should stay put and rest." He kissed his wife's forehead. "We don't want that baby getting too excited and arriving early." Lavender beamed at the two of them.

"Let's all go find our seats. I'm sure Celia will be back any moment."

With the whole town closed down and everyone at the Pavins' for the ceremony, Celia and Roger had taken the opportunity to go for a walk around the square.

"Do you think we should get back?" Celia asked as the church bells chimed noon.

"Why?" Roger replied playfully, "It's our wedding. It's not like they can start without us." Celia laughed and took his arm. When they rounded the north side of the church, the side that faced Dolorous Lane, Celia paused to glance up at the grand stained-glass window.

"Are you all right?" Roger asked, squeezing her hand. Celia didn't answer. She detached from Roger and walked up the steps to stand near the front doorway. She leaned over the handrail and looked out at the square.

"This town has produced nothing but monsters for me," she said, "It made one of me." Roger looked at her, concerned.

"We didn't have to come back, you know."

"Yes, we did. I had to be sure."

"Sure, of what?"

"We're standing here in the middle of it all, all the places and memories that I thought I'd never escape." Celia returned Roger's gaze and smiled.

"You are all I see."

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## Image List



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

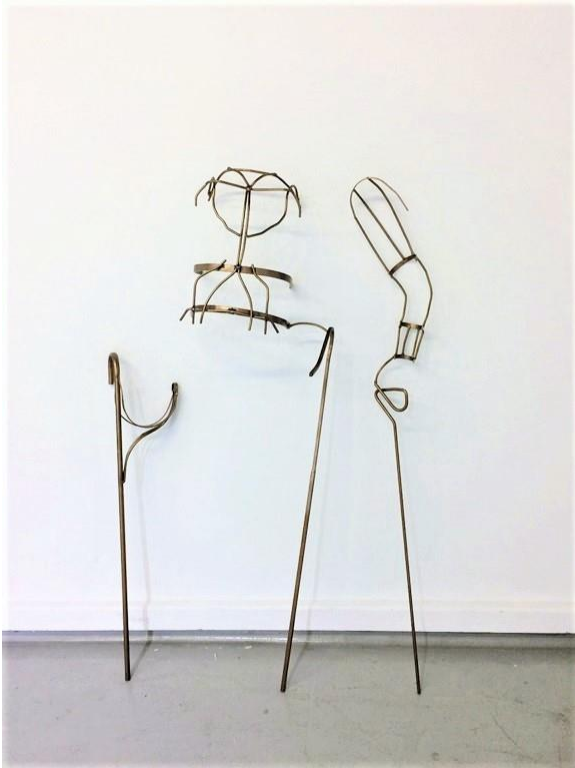


Fig. 4

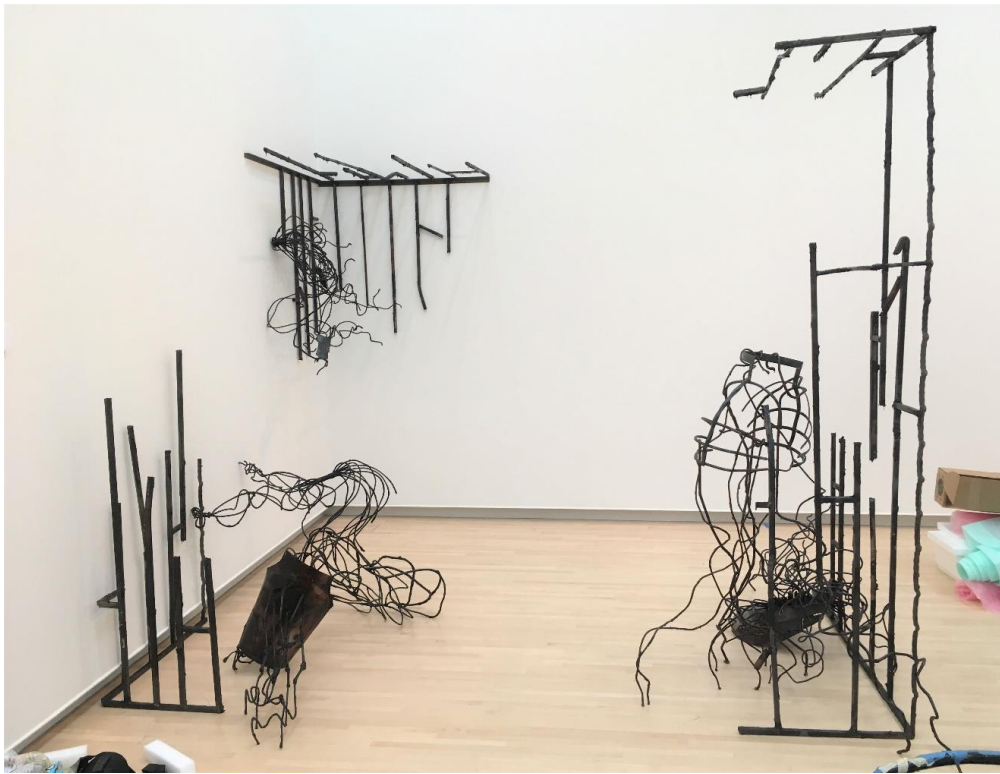


Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

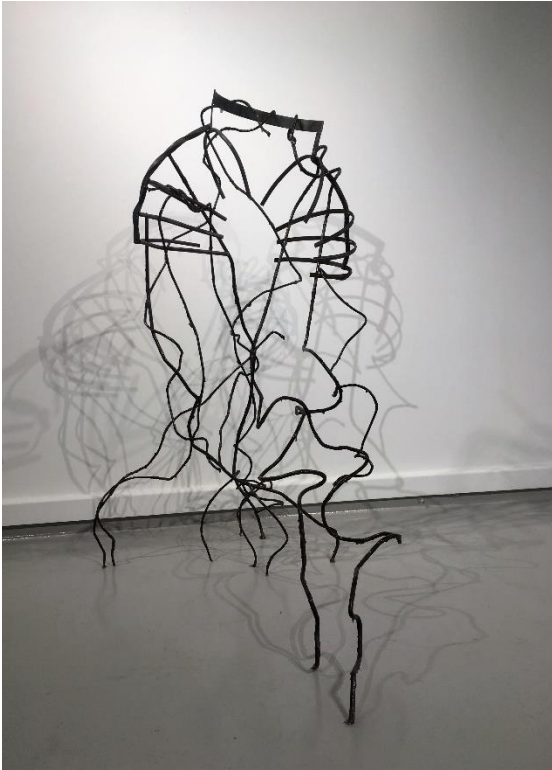


Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10

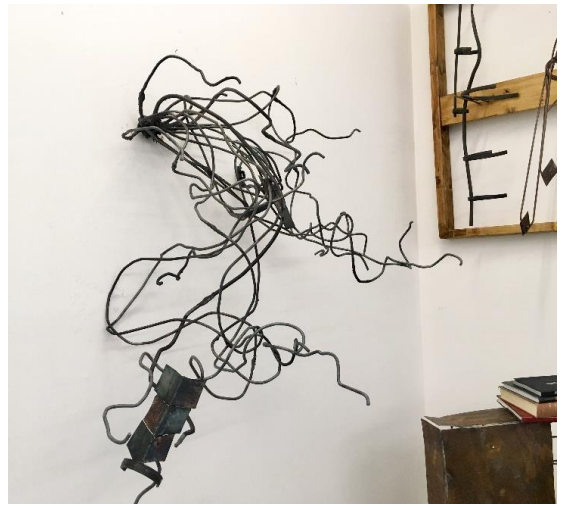
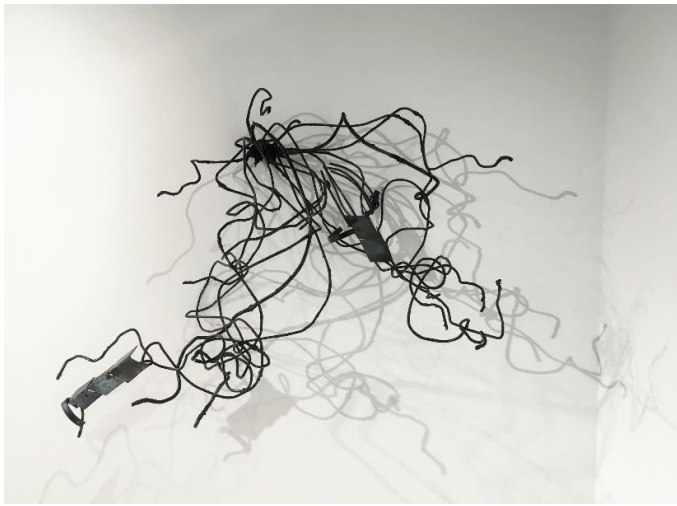


Fig. 11



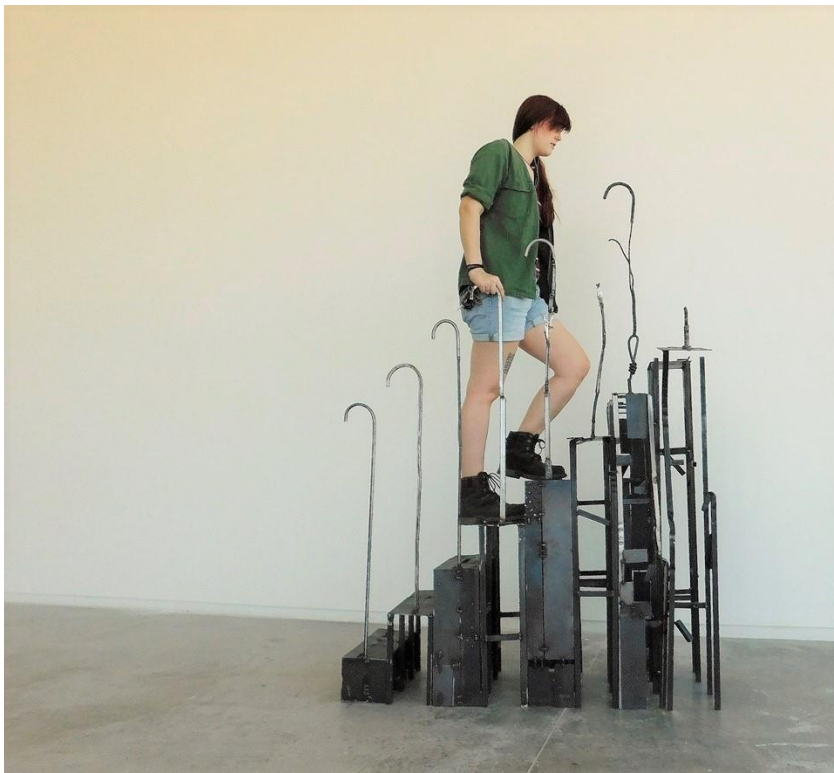


Fig. 12



Fig. 13

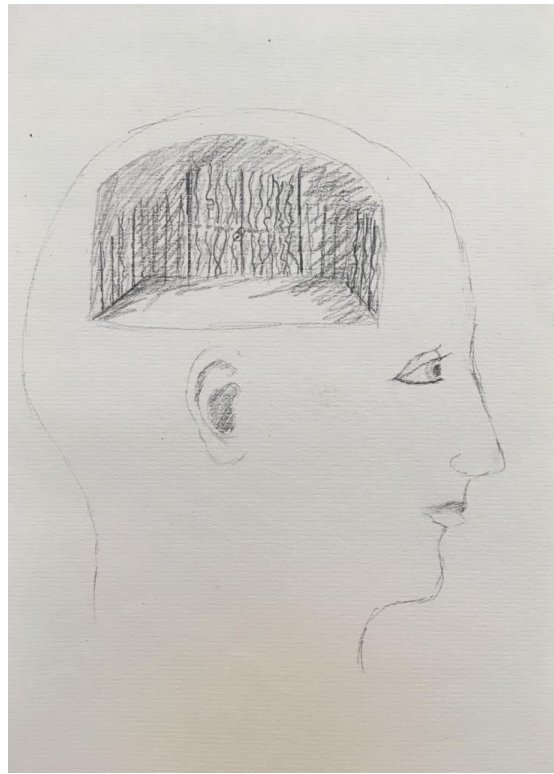


Fig. 14



Fig. 15

*Phantasms*

