

# DUSTY ATTIC

P U B L I S H I N G

OCTOBER 2023 | VOL. 01

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# DUSTY ATTIC

*This is where a witty tagline will go*



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## A Letter from Holl

Greetings and welcome to Dusty Attic!

Thank you so very much for checking out the very first issue of our quarterly lit mag. We wanted to keep this first one small and personal so you'll find two shorts each from Jenna and myself in the following pages.

I enjoy reading and writing odd stories so I'm really excited to share The Face Thief and The Voucher with you. The Voucher is the beginning of a serial story to unfold over several issues!

As a lot of our stories will be of the horror genre, a list of trigger warnings will be provided as needed for every story. The list is available near the end of the magazine if you'd like to check it before continuing.

If you have a story you think belongs in the Attic, please check out our submission guidelines on the site.

Again, thank you for taking an interest in our stories and I hope you enjoy them!

Holl



# False Memories

WRITTEN BY JENNA GOLDSMITH



The October mid-afternoon light set fire to the trees in an array of orange, gold, and crimson. A gentle shower of leaves fell onto the road in front of my car. The windows of the car were open, letting in the cool but comfortable autumn air—it nipped at the cheeks in a playful manner.

On the passenger seat was my faithful companion: a Nikon D850, bought as a graduation gift an unmentionable number of years ago. We were on an adventure together—as much as we could on the way home from work—on the hunt for the perfect autumnal photograph.

A smile played on my lips as I caught sight of a pair of wild turkeys in the field on the opposite side of the road. The only thing that would have made them seem more autumnal would have been a pumpkin patch.

This would be a nice photo, I thought to myself, but I was on my way somewhere very specific.

I could see it in my mind's eye; the old and odd-looking church with a large and sprawling graveyard. When I first saw the building on the drive home from work one day, I was surprised it was a church at all—that tan-stone building all square and simple—because it looked more like a house than a place of worship.

But, I was nothing if not a lover of interesting old architecture, especially if it came with an atmospheric setting like the graveyard and towering century-old trees in autumn.

I couldn't quite remember exactly when I'd first driven by the church, but I remembered thinking to myself how great it would be to photograph. When I'd driven by a second time in late September, I knew I had to bring my camera next time.

My heartbeat quickened with anticipation at the thought of seeing it again. It wasn't that much farther. There would be a stone wall bordering the graveyard and a row of towering maples; then the church itself, all square with its large windows and what had looked to be a widow's walk on the roof—which had been what surprised me when I realized it was a church. Just a little bit farther...

Wait. Where was it?

There was nothing but an empty cornfield and evergreen trees. I couldn't stop the car, so it drifted by what I thought had been the location of the church and graveyard that wasn't there.

Where could it have gone?

There was no mistaking the place—so I thought. I wracked my brain trying to remember again where I'd seen it. It had to be this road, as this was one of the only convenient routes home that didn't involve a highway.

A sense of confusion and frustration washed over me. There was no explanation I could think of for how this church could have vanished into thin air. It just wasn't there. So I drove home in my disappointment.

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The swirling confusion stayed with me over the next couple of days as I traversed every single route I'd ever taken to and from work. The memory seemed so fresh and vivid, I was convinced I must have seen it this fall.

I couldn't find the church anywhere.

A quick Google search for False Memories made my experience seem reasonable and completely ordinary. It seemed a little disconcerting that my brain had just conjured multiple memories of a place that didn't exist... and yet, I couldn't shake the feeling it was real.

But, days passed and there was no sign of the church. Until I had a dream about it.

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I was standing in the churchyard at night, surrounded by the trees and graves. The blue air was crisp with the hints of a coming winter and was softly scented with the smell of burning leaves and damp earth. Crickets chirped into the midnight with the reverence of someone in love with the moon and stars.



The mournful cry of an owl echoed from somewhere above me. A full moon perched itself amongst whips of cloud and acted as a spotlight revealing the looming figure of the church.

The shadows from the tombstones crept silently over the brown grass, but I couldn't look away from the church as it stood firmly against the night.

Where it had looked warm and welcoming in the golden afternoon light, it looked stern and cold now. It seemed to frown down upon me, filling me with a sense of dread. Yet, I found myself inside.

Close, close. The damp air pressed in, smelling distinctly of must, old wine, and candle smoke. Somehow, enough light from the moon shone through the tall arched windows, giving the inside a deep blue wash. It was a tomb of a building, though, with an oppressive silence. All I could hear was the sound of my heartbeat and my shallow breathing.

My feet moved, carrying me down the aisle between the dust-covered wooden pews. I could just make out where I was going, but most of my surroundings were cloaked in thick shadow. The ceiling seemed to go on forever.

I had almost reached the altar— or where it should've been on an empty raised stone platform—when I heard... something. A scratching. The smallest of noises, coming from somewhere nearby. It was the one sound that broke through the chilling silence.

*scratch. scratch. scratch.*

Then I was next to the wall, though how I got there I couldn't tell, running my fingers along the stone.

*scratch... scratch...scratch...*

The sound was getting louder. I held my breath and listened to see if I could pinpoint where it was coming from. The closer I got, the more I realized it was behind the wall.  
*scratch. scratch.*

Maybe it was a mouse. It would make sense in a church like this. The sound was small enough to be a mouse too. Or something else of that size.

*scratch... scratch... scratch...*

Despite concluding to myself that it must be a rodent, I found myself pressing my ear against the cool stone wall. What this would achieve, I couldn't say, but nonetheless, I listened intently for the scratching again. I held my breath to listen and willed my heartbeat to slow so I could hear it better. But the scratching had stopped.

I knelt there in the still, cool, and deathly quiet church, not breathing; not doing anything. Until...

Out of the silence came the most pathetic and hopeless whisper, saying only, "Let me out."

---

I awoke in a cold sweat. My heart pounded in my ears and, though it was still dark, I ran down the hall to the bathroom. I turned on the light and quickly splashed some water on my face.

The soft pleading echoed in my head over and over. I could see the shadowy church walls behind my eyelids. The smell of smoke and must lingered in my nostrils.

If my knuckles hadn't been going white from gripping the countertop so hard, I wouldn't be sure if I was still dreaming. I opened my eyes and looked at myself in the mirror. Besides a sickly pale colour in my skin, all seemed well. At least on the outside.

Inside, my mind was a swirling hurricane of anxiety. I needed to do something.

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Researching a place that might not exist was harder than I thought it would be. I tried so many different search terms to conjure the church in Google, but had no luck.

The image was imprinted on my brain, but I wasn't able to bring it forth into the real world. Sketches of the building always ended up wonky and confusing.

I described it to my parents, my boss, my friends, but the words never did justice to what I saw in my head. Making this abstract concept real seemed like a task I couldn't fulfill.

But I kept dreaming.

In the darkness of the night, the church would return to me.



It was never as vivid as that first time, yet it was always there. A perfectly happy scene, full of usual dreamy nonsense, would be interrupted by the unnerving presence. It was lurking there, even in the background.

I thought I would never be relieved of this mission until a friend of a friend told me about a church that had burnt to the ground and was never rebuilt. The land had been sold and turned into a stripmall. No one was sure if they'd removed the remains of those buried in the graveyard.

I was able to find a yellowed article in an archived newspaper about the fire. The sepia photograph showed a rundown church and my heart almost stopped in my chest. This was the proof I'd been looking for.

Even as a still image, I could sense this darkness around it. What had happened to bring such a sense of foreboding down on this place?

With a renewed energy, I went back into the archives of the local library and found the tiniest hints of a more sinister event that had occurred there. In dusty backrooms, surrounded by antique books, I reread faded newspaper articles from a hundred years ago. I scanned digital pages of a woman's diary, donated by her family after her death. With the snippets of newspaper articles and sections from the donated journals of a woman who lived in the area at the time, I was able to piece together what had happened. At least, an idea of it.

It began with an article, outlining the arrest and subsequent release of five people in connection with the disappearance of a local girl. No one was ever charged.

In the cold blistering winter of 1892, two hundred years after the witch trials in Salem, and over 100 years since the last recorded trial in North America, a young girl of only sixteen was taken into the church by her mother and select members of high standing within the congregation. I couldn't find out what the girl had done, but there were suggestions of occult activities. But these people, including her own mother, were convinced she was the cause of certain problems.

More babies had died that winter than ever before; houses seemed to spontaneously catch fire; the mayor's wife had broken her leg and could no longer walk; stores of food were tainted with mould or had been ravaged by animals.

They needed something to blame.

On January 15, 1892, in the dead of night, that poor girl's mother dragged her into the church and placed her in front of those who considered themselves holy enough to judge her.

I never did find the girl's name. Nor did I find any mention of her fate.

But, deep in my bones I knew she never left the church that night. That helpless voice in the dark; it chilled me to think of what it meant.

This information quenched my curiosity, but it couldn't answer the question of why.

Why had I been able to see it? How had it planted itself inside me, like a seed with roots that dug deep into my fibres?

I knew the strip mall where the church once stood. I'd been there occasionally, but not often. There was no event I could think of that would've tied me to this place; to this history. Connected to it, I was, though. There seemed to be no escape.

The dreams came with more force and I began to feel like they were leaking out of my head and into reality. I could feel the church everywhere now, as if I could turn around and see it wherever I went.

The voice followed me too. In moments of silence, I could hear her, desperate to be free.

As the glowing golden of autumn turned blood red in its death and brown in its decay, as the cold winter winds began to whip the shrivelled leaves into frenzied dance, I could feel my time growing shorter.

It was slow at first, the hint of chill at my fingertips that never seemed to fade. My eyes darkened and lost their glimmer. I was becoming a winter tree, bare and still and sleeping.

I went to sleep each night not knowing if I would wake the next morning...





The darkness of night played around me like an acrobat and brushed against my skin. I had fallen asleep under many blankets and now I shivered with the leaves as the night air blew around us.

Crickets didn't sing and the owl had gone quiet. There were no nightly noises, save for the gentle low hum of the wind. The mask was off and all sounds of comfort had ceased.

I was back. This place had claimed me.

The church imposed its unwavering will on me, drawing me nearer and nearer to the void.

This wasn't a dream anymore. It never was.

A deep feeling of satisfaction fleetingly flooded my body as I felt the cold dry grass beneath my bare feet. The place was real. It was real the whole time, though I didn't know it. It was real, and no one would know but me.

Maybe one day someone would find me here amongst the stone and dirt and moss and moonlight. But maybe the place would claim them too. For it was not a church, but an in between place, where before and after mingled together and collected those who strayed too far.

Collected might have been the wrong word.

The place was hungry.

The deep moaning of the wind as it wound its way between the tree branches and tombstones sounded more like a stomach rumbling than the gentle rustling of the leaves I'd heard before.

The door to the church slowly and silently opened; just enough for a desiccated white hand to reach out and beckon me.

Each step I took felt like a lifetime and I grew colder as the church overshadowed everything else. The blackness was soon upon me and I was nothing.



“  
*Those who dream by  
day are cognisant of  
many things which  
escape those who  
dream only by night.*  
Edgar Allen Poe





# The Face Thief

WRITTEN BY J.L. HOLLOWAY

A crackling fire and the thick scent of marijuana were the perfect setting for my brother's dumb horror stories. Captain of the football team that just won their state championship a few hours ago, Tommy was on top of the world. The shiny W on his letterman jacket danced by firelight while he dramatically spoke of ghostly hauntings and monsters stealing faces.

The five of us have done this camping trip together to mark the end of the school year since middle school. We're an hour's drive outside of town, near where Alejandro's uncle has a hunting cabin. This would be the last end-of-year camping trip for us. Tommy and Jess already received their university acceptance letters.

The stories continued without my attention. I'd always admired the big idiot and his ability to enrapture everyone. After a couple of cheesy ghost stories that we've all heard a thousand times, Tommy started in on the local urban legend of The Face Thief.

Again, we all knew the stories. Missing person cases were eventually solved when they found the body in the forest. The face was always missing. Well, eaten by wildlife according to the reports. If that wasn't weird enough, there's always someone that claims to have seen the person after their death.

"And it hunts for virgins under the full moon, just like tonight!" Tommy threw out his hand toward the glowing orb high overhead.

Jess, the source of the pungent cloud of smoke, snickered. "Then spill the beans, man. How screwed is Alejandro out there taking a piss by himself?" she asked.

I think my brother blushed for the briefest of moments before rubbing the back of his neck. "No, no. He's safe," Tommy said with a shy grin.

"You slut." Mac, the very definition of tall, dark, and handsome, plucked the joint from Jess.

After a long inhale he said, "Your tight end sure has been gone a while for a pee break." I groaned at this overused double entendre they all loved to apply to Alejandro's position on the football team.

There was an uncomfortable silence among the group as the reality of Mac's statement settled in.

"Hey, Alejandro? It's totally okay if you've gotta shit in the woods, but can you let us know you're okay?" I asked the tree line.

The leaves rustled in the darkness beyond the campfire's glow. Tommy's stories had us momentarily questioning reason. Mac stood, his defensiveness taking over.

Alejandro stepped out of the darkness, zipping his pants. "Sorry about that. Thought I heard something and got bladder shy."

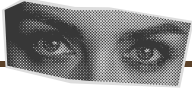
Alejandro took the joint from Mac. "Thanks, man." "Since when do you smoke?" Jess asked while she pulled another joint from her shirt pocket and lit it.

"It's a night to celebrate, right?" He flopped down onto the log next to Tommy and leaned gently against him. Tommy smiled. It was nice seeing how happy those two were together. Took them forever to admit their feelings for one another. "Did I miss a virgin dying? Why is it always a virgin in those stories?"

Everyone laughed at the absurdity.

The stories, jokes, and highs continued well past midnight and the long day was weighing heavily on me. Standing up took more effort than it should, since my high was only secondhand. It was obviously messing with my eyes too, 'cause I'd swear the colors on Alejandro's letterman jacket were backwards. "I'm tired of being the fifth wheel on this ride. Keep it down, would you?"

Jeers of "party pooper", "boring", and "virgin" followed me to my tent, and it wasn't long before sleep won the struggle.



A scream ripped through my dreamless subconscious.

"Jess?" I instinctively asked the heavy silence.

Hearing no response, I untangled myself from the sleeping bag. A stomach-turning smell hit me like a wall as I opened the tent's flap. Something large and misshapen shifted in the fire.

The sight was worse than the smell, as I realized it was what was left of- "Mac?" The name escaped my trembling body. His jacket had melted onto him. His skin had blistered and blackened, a ghoulis combination of blood and charcoal. Mac's groans of pain fell silent as his head flopped in my direction.

Tommy nearly ran me over as he barreled around the side of the tent. He firmly grabbed my shoulders, pulling my attention to him. He was covered in blood. With true terror in his eyes unlike anything I've ever seen, he yelled, "Get out of here! Get help!"

A hand burst forth from his chest, clutching Tommy's still-beating heart. The pounding of the heart was deafening. I could feel its rhythmic pulse in my chest. There's no way a heart could beat that loud. The blood was thick and dark. Slowly, it flowed down over the hand clutching it. I knew I was covered in blood, my brother's blood.

Tommy mouthed the word *Run*, but there was no sound.

Alejandro was standing behind him. His eyes were... wrong. Fire light danced in the dark orbs.

I ran.

What else could I do? I had no idea what was happening, but my brother said run, so I ran.

My God. My brother. Dead. I watched him die right in front of me, and there was nothing I could do.

"Shit, shit, shit." The word kept coming. A panicked chant in the darkness. I fished my cell phone out of my pocket while dodging trees.

Where was I even going?

No service, of course. My chant continued. I wasn't even sure if it was vocal, or only in my head at that point.

But 911 always goes through, right? I hoped that was true as I punched in the number and pressed the green button.

Then the phone was no longer in my hand as I tripped over something. The ground rushed up to meet me.

By the light of the phone, I saw Alejandro. At least, I thought it was Alejandro. He was dead. It looked like something had ripped his face off and just left him laying in the forest. I don't know how, but I was certain it was him.

Oh God. What had killed my friends?

I wanted to scream and throw up, but I could hear it running towards me in the darkness.

My brother's words replayed in my head on repeat.

*Get out of here! Get help!*

There's nothing but trees for miles.

*Get out of here! Get help!*

Trees and the god-damned Face Thief.

*Get out of here! Get help!*

I realized that I was running for the cabin we had passed yesterday on the hike out here. The cabin Alejandro's uncle owned. It wasn't far from the campsite. I had to be getting close by now.

My cell phone started ringing through the trees behind me, an obnoxiously upbeat jingle that made me want to scream and cry.

It had to be the police calling back. I could lock myself inside the cabin until the police came. They know we come out here every year. The cops had taken Jess's marijuana a couple of times.

Jess! My heart sank. I had not seen her at the campsite. Please be alive, please.





While the trees and brush are thick this time of year, the trail remained well intact. I instinctively followed it, with only the full moon to light my way and the horrors behind to motivate me forward. I could hear movement and multiple voices in the forest. I couldn't make out the words, but they felt like a trap anyway.

At last! The cabin.

A simple structure of aged wood, the cabin looked as if it had always been a part of the forest.

And the door wasn't locked.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you," I mumbled as I sank to the floor, leaning against the inside of the now-locked door.

The relief dissipated quickly as I feared that thing, that monster, getting in before help could get here. There had to be something here I could use to defend myself.

I crept through the abandoned cabin, cringing at the squeaky floorboards and flinching at mounted heads of deer and even a bear. Glancing at a reflection of myself in the dim light of the full moon startled me.

By a stack of logs rested a hatchet. An old wood burning stove waited patiently to offer warmth in exchange for the gathered wood nearby.

Footsteps in the hallway I had just come from.

My fingers gripped the handle of the hatchet and my heart pounded in my chest.

"What the hell happened back there?" It was Jess, her words shaky from panic and tears.

I looked to the mirror, to muster the confidence to call out to Jess.

There was no reflection.

My pounding heart was in my throat and I couldn't breathe. It was a window. Trees and moonlight beyond.

"This is some bullshit," said Mac. No, not Mac. Mac was dead. I saw him in the fire. "Tommy and his dumb stories. Now we're all freakin' out and running around in the woods."

The footsteps drew closer to the door, slow and deliberate. But it was definitely only one person. Or thing.

"I told you I thought I heard something out there," said Not Alejandro with a distorted laugh like a laugh track from a cheesy sitcom.

The door knob turned slowly.

Everything went fuzzy, but I heard the hatchet making impact. And I heard screaming.

I was screaming.

Then silence.

Eventually there were bright lights, white and flashing blue, coming in through what is definitely not a mirror.

Then the slow, heavy footsteps of the police officer entering the room with his gun leading the way.

But all I could see was the blood-soaked hatchet in my trembling, blood-soaked hands.

*Drip.*

*Drip.*

*Drip.*

A few feet away, I looked into my own horror-stricken but lifeless eyes.





# The Devouring Ocean

WRITTEN BY JENNA GOLDSMITH

I won't get my voice until I taste blood for the first time.

But my sixteenth birthday is coming and with it my first hunt. The others who've gone before tell me I'm blessed my blood day falls on a new moon. Easy kill. This doesn't ease my nerves.

I've watched many of my predecessors buckle under pressure and take what has already been claimed by the waves. Blood still counts, even cooled. We hold back judgment, knowing every drop is sacred no matter how it was gained. This cannot be me, though.

I am my mother's daughter. The light in her eyes couldn't be darkened by the deep blue depths or the ice above. She was the silent hunter, the last flash of red before the black. She could command storms with her song; this is my destiny.

There is no room for faltering. It must be fresh and all mine.

The black moon rises over the still waters. No storm churns the skies to toss my prey into my arms. The freezing water brushes against my skin, like the blue frosted fingers of those taken before. Sometimes I can still hear their screams in the echoes of waves crashing against rocks. The ocean devours them as much as we do.

A lone ship foolishly moves towards unseen rocks. I wait.

There's a lantern on deck, illuminating a face. Someone is singing. It's the faintest hint of a song, at first, but it grows and it's beautiful. My heart catches for a moment, hearing music above the waves. It's difficult to comprehend. The sound is soft and smooth, like the first breeze of spring against my cheek.

The ship moves closer and I can see their face more clearly in the light. Black hair curls around their ears; a red scarf is loose around their neck. They smile to themselves, thinking that they're alone in the darkness. An ignorant human.

I dart towards the ship as my heart begins to race in anticipation.

This has been done many times, I remind myself, and it will be done many times more.

My nails dig into the wood as I drag myself up, up, up. It's another world, this above place, and feeling the air against my skin strengthens me.

The song echoes in my ears; a sweet elegy for the night.

I'm silent as the silky waters below as I creep towards them. The night wind plays against my skin, but I don't feel the cold anymore. Reaching the top, I rest my arms along the rail, polished smooth by many hands.

They look towards me, startled by the appearance of anyone else.

"Who are you?" they ask, their voice sharper than their song.

I beckon them closer with a finger and they don't hesitate. Maybe they could have before my sweet smile caught them like a fish in a net. It's too late.

Below me, I know the others are waiting. I can feel their eyes, greedy on my back. Eagerly they hope for their share. But I don't think I want to.

I touch my cold fingers to the top of their hand. The warmth of their skin feels almost like fire. It's a sensation I haven't felt before and I don't know if I can hold back. It calls to me.

Bracing against the wood, I push myself to meet them and our lips touch. Skin against skin. Hot breath and dancing tongues. Shivers race down my back as I cling to their arms. It's time. It's time. It's time.

I trace my lips down the skin of their neck as they let a soft moan escape their lips. Their pulse is racing deliciously as I run my tongue along to mark the spot.

The song floats across my memory, boiling my blood as it goes. That beautiful voice is mine now.



Teeth tear and rip and gnash. Blood spills forth between my lips and rushes along my tongue. Warmth fills me in an instant and I am alive.

I tilt my head back and laugh.

I've never done that before.

They struggle in my grasp but I won't let go. I pull them with me down into the cold waters. Red blooms around us like a rose. Even in the depths, where the cold always finds me, the warmth doesn't leave. I drink it in and it keeps me alive.

“

*What would an ocean  
be without a monster  
lurking in the dark? It  
would be like sleep  
without dreams.*

Werner Herzog





# The Voucher: A Story from The Shoppe

WRITTEN BY J.L. HOLLOWAY

With a frustrated sigh, Dana bundled up the sheet of paper she had been writing on and hurled it in the general direction of a nearby waste-bin. She sagged into the creaky chair.

*Why wasn't this scene working? The draft had been going so well, but now? Nothing.*

A chime from her computer notified her of a new email. The subject line read, "Feeling uninspired?"

Dana scoffed. "It's two in the morning, Google. Surely there's someone more interesting to spy on."

She hovered the cursor over the email notification and felt herself zone out for an indeterminate amount of time before deciding against clicking it. Instead, she visited the bathroom before collapsing into her bed in the corner of the small dorm room.

Dana dreamed about wandering the aisles of a large used bookstore. It was a frequently recurring dream for her. There was, however, a sense of urgency this time that the dreams did not usually have. The tension built as she moved quickly through the never ending shelves of books. And she began to realize out of the corner of her eye, the books beside her were fading as she passed. Dana stopped to look back at the shelf more closely. The books were still there, but they were cast in sepia, and the names and titles were slowly fading into illegible nonsense.

She carefully reached for a book that felt familiar though she was certain she had never seen it before. Perhaps it had been on Instagram during one of the nights of mindless scrolling. She turned the cover toward her and found her own name printed along the top, but the image was blurring and fading before her very eyes.

Bolting upright, Dana found herself back in her room, still dressed and under the sheets. She looked to the waste-bin and the pile of crumpled sheets of paper in and around it. Processing the light now coming in through the blinds, Dana's heart skipped as she looked to the clock. 8:22. She was very late for class. Again.

In a rush, she gathered her things and didn't notice the email open itself on her laptop. A loading image of a book with slowly turning pages appeared.

She closed the laptop and slid it into her back without looking at the screen.

Pack slung over her shoulder, Dana stopped at the door.

The printer was running.

"The hell?" she asked, hand lingering on the door knob.

Dana crossed the small room in a couple of steps and hesitantly picked up the sheet

Some kind of fancy coupon. There was no way her cheap printer could have produced something so crisp. An aged paper look with swirling border designs and fine calligraphy read, "Voucher. Good for one product at The Shoppe. We look forward to your visit. Signed Sir Reginald Dartmillian."

*What the hell?*

"Definitely need to get a coffee on the way," she said to herself. "Already late anyway."

Coupon still in hand, she left her dorm room. But beyond wasn't the hallway she had walked everyday for the last two years.

The lighting was the first giveaway. Instead of the industrial glow of common public spaces, this room was seemingly lit by candles. There were no visible candles, but the light was warm and flickering gently; certainly not the unyielding glow of overhead fluorescents.

There was stuff though. Lots and lots of stuff.

Dana couldn't see the back of the room through a maze of shelves piled beyond capacity with bits and baubles and books and fabric and so much more. She ran her fingers carefully along the nearest shelf, inspecting the contents.



She had expected dust but everything was pristine.

"Oh, sorry," she said to no one in particular.

"Hello?" Dana asked the room.

Looking down the row of shelves, this aisle was considerably darker than the rest of the place had been so far. However, there was a single source of light perhaps one hundred feet away. Dana made her way toward it cautiously as she finished the sandwich slice.

No reply.

She thought she could hear running water further into the strange room.

The aisle came to a dead end with the Chandos Portrait hanging on the wall. To her left, a floor to ceiling twelve-foot wide wall of scrolls tucked away. Opposite the scrolls, two glass cases held a number of objects spaced out and obviously on display. Dana stepped closer to look at the objects within.

"Is anyone here?" she tried again.

A head appeared over a stack of nearby books. With a hot pink undercut that defied gravity, prominent cheekbones, and pointed ears, they certainly weren't anything like Dana had expected.

A paint brush, a see through glass jar like an old ink bottle, a 14-inch white feathered Quill (but the white shifted colors as she tilted her head), a compass, a jeweled necklace, half a dozen rings, a row of books too old to read the faded print on the spines—

With a bored expression and tone, they said, "Yes."

At a complete loss for any words, Dana held up the voucher.

"Ah. First timer. Got it. Reggie is..." they trailed off, gesturing into the cluttered maze before continuing, "somewhere. Help yourself. He'll show up eventually."

"Thousands have visited The Shoppe," came a quiet British voice behind Dana. She jumped and spun, but saw no one. "And you're only the thirty-seventh person to wander down this particular aisle."

"Uh, thanks," she said but the pink hair and the head it was attached to had already vanished when she looked back.

Some part of her brain must have been trying to remind Dana that she was late for class, but that part was overwhelmed by the sheer fascination with this place. The Shoppe, so the voucher called it, seemed to be equal parts antiques store, used bookstore, and flea market. She could sense so much more beneath the surface. And for the first time in her adult life, Dana believed in magic.

Dana looked down at the source of the voice: an upright red panda in a gray flat cap and a white patch of fur on the chest that resembled a bowtie.

A whole section of books on writing, including several copies of *On Writing*. An entire display of paint tubes in every color she could possibly imagine. Carved statuettes of animals and religious symbols. Several models of potter's wheels. A vast array of notebooks. *One can never have enough notebooks.*

"Apologies, miss. I did not mean to startle you," he said. Using both paws, he removed the cap and bowed slightly. He replaced the cap before saying, "I am Sir Reginald Dartmillian, but you may call me Reggie."

"D-Dana," she stammered, holding up the voucher.

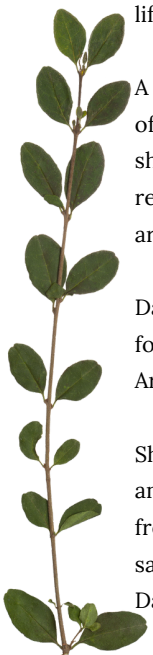
"Of course. I'm afraid, however, that the contents of those cases are not for sale."

Dana nearly fell into the pool of water at the base of a seven-foot high waterfall as she rounded the corner of shelves. Around the pool was a grassy sitting area with a picnic waiting.

Dana swallowed hard as her mind raced for words. *Literally anything. Just say something.* "Okay," she finally managed. She looked to the wall of scrolls while searching for something else to say.

She peeked into the picnic basket. Looking around to see if anyone was watching, she took a triangular cut of a sandwich from within. Ham and swiss. Her favorite. Taking a bite of the sandwich and backing away from the impressive waterfall, Dana bumped into a shelf.

"Those would be contracts," Reggie said. "A very potent and rare form of magic known only to The Proprietor. Entities of established power are sometimes permitted to become Patrons of the Arts."





Dana stared at the wall of scrolls.

Reggie laughed. Dana couldn't help but smile at the adorable sound.

"It's a lot to take in," he said. He gestured for her to follow as he dropped to all four and walked back up the aisle. "Is there anything in particular that you were hoping to find here?"

"I don't even know where *here* is."

Arriving at the waterfall, Reggie pulled a small bundle of white grapes from the picnic basket and took a seat on the grass. "The Shoppe serves artists. When an artist is most in need of supplies or inspiration, The Shoppe makes itself available."

He offered her a grape, but Dana shook her head. "Thanks though."

He shrugged and ate it. "And, as you so keenly noticed, The Shoppe also acts as a bit of a museum."

Dana slumped down into the grass beside Reggie. She opened her mouth to speak but was cut off by the sound of heavy knocking echoing through the aisles.

*Thump. Thump. Thump. Thump.*

Reggie stood quickly, dropping the grapes.

"What—" Dana started to ask.

The pink-haired person from the front just appeared beside Reggie. Both looked worried. "Do you have an appointment you forgot to mention?" they asked.

Reggie merely shook his head.

*Thump. Thump. Thump.*

"Perhaps a portal failure?" they asked, looking at Dana.

"Not since the war," Reggie said with a dismissive wave.

"What—" Dana was feeling sick to her stomach.

Reggie interrupted her, still talking to the pink-haired one, "You know the contingencies, Vil."

*Thump. Thump.*

Acknowledging her at last, Reggie said, "Please follow me, miss. Quickly." He scurried past the waterfall to a new maze of shelves Dana hadn't seen yet. She glanced back at Vil, but they were already gone.

*Thump.*

To be continued...





## A Letter from Jenna

That's all, folks!

Thank you so much for reading the first ever issue of Dusty Attic. I'm so excited that this small publication is finally out in the world; it feels like a project truly formed of passion. False Memories is actually based on a real life experience I had with a church, as described in the story, and being unable to locate it after remembering the place so vividly. I still hold on to a smidge of hope that the church IS real and that I'll find it someday... though, hopefully it won't eat me.

We are a teeny tiny team here at Dusty Attic and I cannot express how much we appreciate the support you've given us so far!

If you'd like to help us keep this small magazine going, please consider a one-time donation via Kofi or become a Patron. All Patreon members get exclusive early access and extra behind the scenes content. We are brainstorming even more ways to expand the fun spooky shenanigans happening over there.

Even if you can't contribute anything, we are so happy that you're here and we hope you consider submitting to us in the future. Our hope is to feature a wide variety of voices with this publication.

If you'd like to stay updated on our future issues and other goings on, you can find us on Twitter and Instagram.

We hope to keep seeing you around the Attic!

Jenna



## Trigger Warnings:

**False Memories**

**Claustrophobia**

**The Face Thief**

**Drug use, language, gore, and death involving teenagers**

**The Devouring Ocean**

**Blood, violence**

**The Voucher**

**Anthropomorphic animal**



## About the writers

### **Jenna Goldsmith**

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Jenna Goldsmith is a writer from Ontario, Canada. She writes short stories and novels of all shapes and sizes, usually of the whimsical or spooky variety. When she's not writing, she's almost always painting or baking.

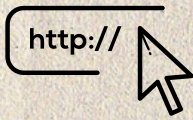
### **J.L. Holloway**

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J.L. Holloway, or Holl, is a writer from the southern United States. They write fantastical and bizarre stories and scripts. As well as lending their voice to bringing stories to life.



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