

# LVW Flash Fiction Contest 2017

## HONORABLE MENTION

### **Last Dance** *by Jamie Brian*

Grandmother is standing ankle deep in the tangle of fake spiderwebs she bought for the annual Halloween party.

“Lucy, could you please run up to the attic and grab my orange tablecloth?”

“Sure, Gram.” Lucy races to the stairs.

She takes a deep gulp of air in the doorway. Lucy has never ventured this far into the house. With a rusty moan, the door creaks open. The ceiling is slanted, and Lucy can’t stand without hunching over.

Everything in the attic is covered in a thick layer of dust, but the phonograph looks like it has just been placed there. Lucy has seen one of these before, in the portrait of her great-grandmother that hangs over the fireplace.

She is drawn to the phonograph immediately. Its horn is engraved with horses that seem to gallop around on tiny, ruby-studded wings. The crank handle glows in the dim light of the attic. In a trance, she turns it until the record begins to spin. The machine whines to life, sending out an otherworldly melody that makes her breath falter.

One of the horses has lifted its head to stare at her. Its eyes are a piercing red. She is certain she hasn’t imagined this. She reaches out to touch it, and when she does Lucy is transported to a high-ceilinged ballroom.

Ladies in flowing ballgowns float around the floor with men in dark suits. They are all wearing masquerade masks. An orchestra performs a waltz, and she recognized the tune immediately. It was playing in her grandmother’s attic.

“Excuse me,” she asks a man carrying wine glasses, “What is this place?”

“We don’t answer questions before midnight, poppet.”

Bewildered, Lucy stumbles back and observes the people in the room. They possess a kind of ethereal perfection when they dance. There are ten rows of stony-faced dancers, with no one out of step. They even blink in rhythm with the music.

She runs after the waiter.

“Hey! What happens at midnight?”

He shakes his head and walks away, gesturing to an intricate gold clock on the wall. Five minutes to midnight. She sinks to the floor with her head between her knees, tapping her fingers to the tick of the minute hand. Time never seemed to matter much before, but now she is acutely aware of its passing. A young man greets her and asks her to dance.

“No one will tell me what’s going on, so I guess one dance can’t hurt me,” Lucy says.

He seems normal enough, this boy, but the mask leaves her feeling uneasy. They sway across the room, stepping in line with the other dancers.

The clock chimes twelve thunderous times, each vibration seeming to hang in the air above the ballroom. The guests remove their masks in unison.

She looks at her suitor's face. In place of his eyes are two enormous rubies like the ones embedded in the phonograph.

She runs to the other end of the ballroom in search of an exit. The floor begins to rumble, and the dancers' skin is illuminated an eerie white from within. They become skeletons in their Victorian finery, continuing to dance as if nothing has changed.

Mirrors cover the walls. Lucy can't find her reflection in the glass. She waves her hand, and a skeleton with ruby eyes waves back.

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Perched above the sea of decorations, Gram is wondering why Lucy hasn't returned.

She peeks inside the attic, but her granddaughter is nowhere to be found. There's a light shining from the phonograph on the table.

"That's odd," Gram mumbles, "This looks like my mother's, but we lost it in a fire decades ago."

There's a voice coming out of the phonograph: the unmistakable, honey-sweet drawl of Lucy Jennings.

THE END

*Jamie Brian is a pilot and flight instructor from western Pennsylvania. When not drifting among the clouds, she can be found immersed in a book. She also enjoys running, swimming, and yoga.*