

Gigi Dukes

English 3

10/28/2020

Ms. Burrow-Stone

A Ghost's Flame

Content Warning: Graphic Description of Gore

The room around me spun until it was no more. The walls around me disappeared and became horizons on the edge of a forest. In the place of beautiful furniture, gently taken care for items, and heirlooms, became ghastly macabre trees. They felt gray and dead. They *felt* sad, lonely, abandoned. The grass around them became gray, too. It felt soft to the touch, like a cloud.

As I looked around the trees with caution, I felt a feeling of uneasiness, to say the least. I didn't get the feeling until I looked down. A dirt path started to form through the trees. The trees themselves seemed to move out of the way of the path.

As I proceeded to the path with extreme caution, I saw my bare feet. Small things that shouldn't be proportionate to my body. I looked at my hands as I brought them to my face. As I touched my face and hair, everything felt younger. Then I saw it. Or I guess, didn't see it. The scar I had made the day of his death was missing. A minute later, the red dot made by a sharp pencil on the top of my wrist was gone. I didn't just feel younger, I *was* younger. I noticed I was wearing a white dress, frilly and delicate. It was simple, barely past my knees, with two straps to hold it up, and two small frills near the base. It looked like the replica of a yellow one I had in fifth grade. My fifth grade self.

“Do you like it?”

I heard the voice, a mixture of euphoria and sickness washed over me. A shiver ran down my spine.

“Do you remember me?”

Elias. His voice was strong, but kind, with a hint of crookedness. The memory of him was burned into my eyes. I saw his image. His spiky, black hair shining in the sun, his lime-green eyes still piercing my soul. I remembered his lean physique and gentleness with me. Then I recalled the funeral. Black, bleak, and miserable.

I thought he was gone forever. A friend back from the grave. Tears welled up in my eyes. I slowly turned to face him, and what I saw took my breath away. Fear took over my heart, yet I couldn't run, I just stared and gaped. He was there.

His eyes are gone, only bleeding gaping voids left in their place. A line of crimson is dripped from his mouth. His hair had turned white and had a blood spray on it. He looked skinnier, almost bony. He's wearing a white, blood-stained shirt and black ripped jeans. His feet are bare, just like mine. If he didn't look like he'd just commit a murder, he'd almost look fashionable.

He reaches out to touch me with his left hand, a knife in his right hand. I flinch. He sees me staring at the knife.

"I'm not going to hurt my princess, I could never, but it's stuck in my hand", He gestures at the knife. "Could you help me, luv?"

He smiled his crooked smile. Slowly, I nod and take my hands to the knife, I tug gently but doesn't move.

"Oh you're so cute, but I think you know it doesn't work like that."

I nod and take a deep breath. I take my forearm and face it up, and I cut downwards. I

feel nothing as my blood pools onto his hand. I hear it splatter onto the dirt ground below us. The knife slips out of his hand and he hugs me.

"Thank you for choosing to stay with me." I fell into his arms. They felt stronger. Or maybe I felt fainter? I closed my eyes and accepted it. Accepted him.

"Our pain is over. We can be together."

I nod and smile as a haze washes over me. I slipped away into darkness.

Jericho opened her eyes. She was back in her room. *Oh thank the Gods.* She looked around to the familiar setting. The mirror across the room for her returning a startled image of herself. *It was just a dream.* She looked over at her alarm clock. *Of course it was the anniversary of that day. Why else would she have that type of dream?*

She pulled herself out of bed as a stray tear fell from her eye. *She hoped that man rots in jail. How could humanity be so horrid to their own kin?* She wiped her tears and lit a vanilla candle for her fallen friend. She counted to five and blew out the candle. She watched the wisps of smoke drift through the air, trying to focus on the good memories, but all the terrible things she had experienced came to the front of her mind. *Five years.* She hadn't noticed, but she was crying now. Silently heaving and gasping as tears streamed down her cheeks.

"Jericho!" her mom shouted from downstairs, "Breakfast!" She wiped her face with her pajama sleeve and decided to get ready for the day, "Coming!"

She threw on her t-shirt and shorts, with her black paint splattered hoodie. She pulled her knee-high socks and her black Converse on. She pushed her laptop and notebooks into a sleek, black canvas bag. Throwing her phone and purple bluetooth earbuds into her pockets. She was ready for the day. At least physically. Mentally and emotionally, she knew the day was

going to be crap. She shouldered her bookbag, and went to the door. She looked at the candle as she shut the door.

She walked down the stairs to the kitchen, her mother looked her up and down. She gave a sad smile and hugged her daughter.

"I know ... we can visit him later, okay? Did you do your candle ritual?"

Jericho nodded. She appreciated and loved her mother more than anything. After his passing, her mother had taught her the candle ritual as she said it reminds the spirits that you care for them and still love them. Her mother probably made it up to help her feel better, and in truth, it did, They used to do it daily, then monthly, and now Jericho alone did it once a year on the anniversary of the deadly date.

Jericho's mother pulled a stray hair behind her ear as she handed her something wrapped in tinfoil. It was perfectly warm and crinkled as she put it in her hoodie. She knew it was one of her mother's famous pancake breakfast sandwiches. She could smell the sweetness of pancakes and the eggs seasoned with salt and pepper.

"Are we going to have a good day today, Jerry?" her mom asked sweetly as she pulled her into a hug. Jericho rolled her eyes and mumbled, "Yes, we are." A smile spread across her face. She hugged her mom back, enjoying her warmth.

"You didn't let it burn for more than 5 seconds, right?" her mom asked.

"Who knows?" Jericho responded coyly. Her mom kissed her cheek and left out the door for school. She walked to the bus stop and passed Elias' house. She looked at the darkened house's window and she recalled the events that happened after the funeral. His dad went to prison, his mom moved away to Vermont in sorrow, and now the house was up for rent, but nobody would rent it due to the gruesome events that had taken place. She kept walking and decided to look anywhere else but the house. Her gaze ended up across the street and she saw

a lanky boy. He had a dark grey hoodie that covered his face. For some odd reason, he felt familiar.

She had finally made it to the bus stop, the boy was now staring back at her, but all she could make out were his dull green eyes. She felt as if they were reading her soul, and it creeped her out a little bit. The bus pulled up to the stop and she stepped onto it. She sat in her normal spot at the front, it was always the calmest. She looked at where the boy was and he had disappeared. *Creepy.*

She had spent the last few hours in class. She took as many bathroom breaks as she could and had drawn as many ideas she had in her sketchbook. When the bell for lunch rang, she felt nothing else but relief. She told her friends that she was gonna take her lunch alone and decided to sit in the east stairwell, since nobody ever went down it because it was old and dark. *Perfect.* She thought about the next thing she was going to draw and decided on the dream she had last night. She pulled out her sketchbook and a thin dark pen. She had just started to draw Elias when she heard a voice.

"Nice drawing," the voice was smooth and melodious. She looked up in annoyance but was shocked when she saw him. She jumped back. The boy from the bus stop was there. It was the same hoodie and the same green eyes. She knew they didn't go to the same school, so he must have followed her.

"Who are you?! And why did you follow me to school?!" she shouted at the stranger.

"Has it really been that long, Jerry?" the boy stared down at her. He took off his hood and asked her again, "Has it?"

"Elias?" she recognized him. He looked taller and older. She tried to touch him but her hand just passed through his body. It felt a bit like mist. She looked at him questioningly.

"Still a ghost, Jerry." he replied. She was a bit dismayed at the sight of him.

"How?" she asked. He sat down on the floor in front of her and stared back.

"You had a dream about me. When you dream about dead people, at least the ones you know well, you can call them to you. But, we only get a couple chances because it takes a lot of energy. I chose this time because I really wanted to see you and I need your help."

She stared at him, noticing that he was more hovering above the floor than sitting. She couldn't believe this, "With what?"

"I need to destroy my house, but I don't have a physical body to do it. Basically, when the place you died holds your strongest memory, it tethers you to that place. It either needs to be destroyed or you waste away in Limbo." he replied. He shivered at the word Limbo. She always wanted to do something for him, *besides* say goodbye, *besides* a childish candle ritual. She turned to him and nodded in silence. *Finally*.

She stood in front of the old Bookley house, the seventy-five cent lighter clutched in her hand. She wasn't sure what exactly she was doing, but Elias told her there's an old Jerry Can full of gas in the back house. *Irony*. He had told her to put it inside and then handed her a key to the house. She hadn't known where the key had come from but she held that, too.

They both ran around the side of the house and into the backyard. She spotted the Jerry Can in the overgrown grass and weeds, grabbed it, and ran to the house to unlock the door. She went into the house and poured gasoline on the carpet. As she opened a window and walked back out, she also turned on the stove as a nice touch.

When she got outside, she took the lighter out of her pocket, looking at Elias. He smiled as she flicked the lighter on and threw it through the window. The sound of the plastic breaking and the carpeting *bursting* into flames can be heard as she closed the window and ran away from the house, sitting in the grass on the other side of the street. She watched the red glow of the fire fill the room and move towards the kitchen area, then intensify quickly before Elias and her are momentarily rocked by an explosion of fire and glass from the house.

She looked over at Elias, sitting with her, and he smiled back at her before slowly starting to fade away. A tear came to Jericho's eye as she smiled as well, before the beeping of a smoke detector brought her back to reality.

She sat down in front of the chaos facing the street, neighbors and her mother running toward her, their eyes filled with concern. Yet, all she could feel was happiness. She pulled out her sketchbook as her mother asked her if she was okay.

"Yes. *We're fine.*"

Story Rationale.

I decided to go with this story because it was something that had potential for the assignment and that was sitting in my archives. It was a year old and I wanted to do something with it because it had really good descriptions and also because it's near Halloween, so thematically, it fit.

Speaking of theme, I wanted it to share two themes with *The Alchemist*, those of which are Dreams/Omens, and Love. Dreams/Omens are shown through Jericho's dream earlier and the omen her mother makes about the candle ritual. Love is obviously shown through Jericho's love for her mom and Elias. She only agrees to help Elias because she loves him.

"What is magical realism and why is it a worthwhile genre?" was my essential question I was tasked with. I think *A Ghost's Flame* shows the breadth of what you can do with this genre and shows the subtlety of themes. It's also very challenging with how much you can explain and do with it.