

'Surrounded By Ghosts (A Short Story) by Scott Davis

Robin isn't sure how he got Here.

He has a vague impression of being led by the hand through a misty gloom to a small Stone House. He knows this place and feels comfortable going inside. It was a long time ago, but it feels familiar. The upper floor is a small room with a high darkened ceiling which seemed much larger back then. But something is changed. There are walls but they are invisible through the smoke. No windows. No doors.

The center of the room is lit from above, but no source can be seen.

He is trapped.

Sense memories are interrupted by alarm. There is a presence here. Perhaps several. Or many. Can't be sure.

Muscles tense to attention. Eyes widen and water straining to define to his mind that which is only felt. There is a threat here. But it has yet to reveal itself to him.

Though the boundaries of this prison cannot be seen he feels the space closing in tighter. Coiling and suffocating in a sinister serpentine motion.

The fear rises, tossing in the chest like an angry ocean. He feels the malice, anger, hate. They close in hissing and growling, anxious to strike.

If only he had a weapon.

HERE

HERE IS WHERE I BEGIN
SOMEWHERE TOWARD THE END
NOTHING IS FADED
ALL IS THE LIGHT
HERE IS WHERE I BEGIN

I MUST BEGIN AGAIN
NO WAY TO KNOW THE END
CLOSING THE BOOK
WITHOUT MARKING THE CHAPTER
I MUST BEGIN AGAIN
AT THE END

SUDDENLY SOMEONE IS THERE
GROWING A THREATENING STARE
DRAWING A SWORD FROM NOWHERE
MOVING TO STRIKE FROM THIN AIR

IN MY HEART
I KNOW THE WEIGHT
I FEEL THEIR HATE
I'LL BE THE ONE
HANDLING FATE

NO ONE CAN HELP ME IN HERE
BEATING BACK ENGINES OF FEAR

ALL GOES RED
BLADES FLASHING BACK
BLINDLY ATTACK

I MUST BECOME
STRONGER THAN THAT

ECHOES OF PROMISES HEARD
EMPTY FOR WANT OF A WORD

I MUST BEGIN TO MEND
STARTING AGAIN AT THE END
WITH A MIND TO REMIND MYSELF
MARKING OFF TIME
I MUST BEGIN AGAIN
AT THE END
FEWER AHEAD
AND MUCH FARTHER BEHIND
HERE I BEGIN AGAIN
AT THE END

I SEEM TO BE NOWHERE
CLOSER TO HERE THAN THERE
HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL
FROM ALL THAT IS LOST
I CAN'T BEGIN AGAIN

Robin feels the heft and hilt in his right hand before it materializes, a sword of perfect balance. The blade seems to know him and he perceives that it is speaking to him. The voice is ancient and weary.

"You must fight that which cannot be beaten. You must win. You must find a way. I am here to guide, but you must have the will."

This shouldn't work. Steel against spirit, a futile operation at best. But work it does.

The Ghosts move around him in chaotic patterns reaching, scratching stabbing.

They are angry as though wronged in a way that cannot be absolved.

Holding his own against the phantom tempest Robin begins to hear their ragged voices calling for retribution.

They attack. He is ready.

THE STONE HOUSE

I SEEM TO KNOW THIS HOUSE OF STONE
SHE LED ME HERE TO STAND ALONE
THE ONES I SEE NOT FLESH OR BONE
THE FACES HERE REFLECT MY OWN

THE ROOM UPSTAIRS - MY WORLD OF DREAMS
SURROUNDED NOW - FORGOTTEN SCENES
THE WORLD INSIDE THAT UPSTAIRS ROOM
A MAGICAL PLACE I LEFT TOO SOON

SO COME ALONG - I'M HERE TO GUIDE
IT FEELS UNREAL - THE LIFE INSIDE
THE VOICES HERE DON'T KNOW MY SONG
THE TIME IS NOW TO MOVE ALONG

And then the cloud parts letting loose a flood of blinding sun. He is a creature Born To The Sky in much the same way that a dolphin is a child of the sea. Immense and powerful wings obey every thought and speak to him in a voice he knows. All the many flying dreams of youth pale in comparison. Horizons twist and fade giving way to pillars of Heaven and diving back down. Sheer and potent freedom. The cares and affairs of humanity mean nothing to The Sky. Others are here and call to him and smile urging him ever higher, ever faster. His wings speak to him and whisper secrets of untethered elation and

sights seen only to angels. The Sky is boundless and clean yet it feels as secure and close as the womb. He is no longer a creature of Earth. Flesh, blood, bone all have disappeared. All that is felt is the wind. Hard and unceasing. Lifting his wings ever higher. His heart pounds and pushes the flow of air through his veins. All sensation, all conscious effort is spent staying aloft. And rewarded a thousand fold with endlessly flowing joy. To his core, Robin feels he belongs here.

BORN TO THE SKY

BORN TO THE SKY
LIVING TO FLY
LIVING TO TRY

BORN TO THE SKY
LIVING TO FLY
FLYING TO FIND OUT

FROZEN
DON'T KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN
GETTING WARMER
SPREADING WINGS IN THE LIGHT

WHISPERS
CONCEALED IN THE WIND
GROWING STRONGER
CALLING SOLDIERS TO FIGHT

FLY TO THE END OF THE LINE
HIGHER THAN ARCHANGELS CAN FIND
RISING ABOVE EVEN HEAVEN'S DESIGN

BLIND IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE
DYING TO BE BORN TO THE SKY
LEAVING BEHIND WHAT THE DEVIL MAY FIND

REACH OUT
FOR INVISIBLE STRINGS
NO CONTROLLING
ONLY DREAMING IN FLIGHT

SOARING
CONCEIVED IN A STORM
FED BY LIGHTNING
HELD BY THUNDER AT NIGHT

FLY TO THE END OF THE LINE
HIGHER THAN ARCHANGELS CAN FIND
RISING ABOVE EVEN HEAVEN'S DESIGN

BLIND IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE
DYING TO BE BORN TO THE SKY
LEAVING BEHIND WHAT THE DEVIL MAY FIND

STANDING
IN THE CASTLES OF CLOUD
ASKING QUESTIONS
OF THE DARKEST UNKNOWN

SUNRISE
WHEN SEEN FROM BEHIND
SHINES MORE BRIGHTLY
AND THE ANSWER IS SHOWN

FLY TO THE END OF THE LINE
HIGHER THAN ARCHANGELS CAN FIND
RISING ABOVE EVEN HEAVEN'S DESIGN

BLIND IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE
DYING TO BE BORN TO THE SKY
LEAVING BEHIND WHAT THE DEVIL MAY FIND

FIGHT FOR THE RIGHT TO DEFY
DREAMING TO BE BORN TO THE SKY
NEVER TO FIND WHAT WE'RE LEAVING BEHIND

NO FALLING DOWN ONCE YOU'VE MADE UP YOUR MIND

A burst of light and blink of thought and he feels the Sword fresh in his hand. He has bested a number of the marauders but they keep coming.

As the Ghosts begin succumbing to his attacks, Robin begins to feel remorse and even pity for his tormentors. Now that their number is reduced he can more clearly understand their voices and give thought to their pain. The weapons lower on both sides and he can see a great many scars. Wounds that he clearly has caused them. Old wounds. So many hurts. Robin feels their anguish hard and weeps suddenly and uncontrollably. He realizes the finality of what he has done and the ones he has injured. And the Scars Lament fills his ears.

SCARS LAMENT

IF I'M HONEST I'LL ADMIT THAT I'M A KNIFE
AND LAMENT THE SCARS I'M LEAVING IN THIS LIFE
THOUGH I NEVER MEANT TO CUT THE ONES I STAINED
IN THE ACT OF PASSING THROUGH THEY BLED THE SAME

HOW DO I HEAL?
SCARS GO DEEPER THAN THIS
CAUGHT IN THE WHEEL
I'M KEEPING THE WOUNDED NEAR ME

IF I SAID THAT I WAS SORRY FOR MY SINS
WOULD THERE BE A WAY FOR HEALING TO BEGIN?
IF YOU LET ME MAKE A KEY OUT OF THIS KNIFE
AND LAMENT THE SCARS I'M LEAVING IN THIS LIFE

HOW DO I HEAL?
SCARS GO DEEPER THAN THIS
CUT BY THE WHEEL
I'M KEEPING THE WOUNDED NEAR ME

HOW DO I HEAL?
SCARS GO DEEPER THAN THIS
CAUGHT IN THE WHEEL
I'M KEEPING THE WOUNDED NEAR ME

HOW DO I FEEL?
THERE'S NO HIDING FROM THIS
LIVE BY THE STEEL
I'M MENDING THE ENDING CAREFULLY

Robin opens his eyes. He is back in the battle. The Ghosts forming a hungry whirlwind, looming and malicious. With every phantom that falls by his hand he begins to feel a pain deep within as though a small part of his soul had been taken by force. Another victory, another loss. He still feels the pressure of their assault and responds instinctually defending and attacking sometimes in the same motion. In a

terrible instant he realizes that they are parts of himself. And that by slaying his demons, he is actually injuring himself. By the time this becomes apparent, he stands still and breathless as the remaining Ghosts swirl about. He feels almost completely empty. His Hollow Body numb and shaking with that realization.

HOLLOW BODY

THE SECRET LIES IN SILENCE
AND LEARNING TO BE STILL
IN TURNING DOWN THE VOLUME
THE SPACE BEGINS TO FILL

THE WOUNDED PART I CARVED AWAY
HAS LEFT ME FEELING STRONGER
AND NOTHING CAN REACH ME IN HERE

THE WOUNDED HEART I TRIED TO SAVE
WON'T HAUNT ME ANY LONGER

HOLLOW BODY

THE TRUTH LIES IN THE VIOLENCE
AND HIDDEN THERE UNTIL
IN PULLING BACK THE CURTAIN
THE SPACE BEGINS TO FILL

THE ONE REVEALING SECRETS
ISN'T SPEAKING ANYMORE
AND NOTHING CAN TEACH ME TO FEAR

THE DARKNESS HAD DESCENDED
LONG BEFORE I COULD NOT SEE
THE CURTAIN NEVER ENDING
WAS CLOSING IN ON ME

HOLLOW BODY

THE END WAS IN THE MARGINS
HOLDING HANDS WITH TIME
PLOTING OUT HER ANGUISH
AND KNITTING IT WITH MINE

THE PHANTOMS LOST AND ANGRY
AND HIDING FROM THEIR PAIN
THE CURTAIN THEY ARE CLOSING
WILL NEVER PART AGAIN

THE FIRST OF IT'S KIND
THE LAST PLANE OUT
THE ONE THAT YOU KNOW
THE END OF AN ERROR
THE REST OF THE BEST
THE WEB WE UNTANGLED
THE TIES THAT WE BIND WITH
THE WEIGHT OF THE ASHES
THE LOVE THAT SHE GAVE US
THE CIRCLE UNBROKEN
THE SQUARE ROOT OF EVIL
THE ONLY SURVIVOR

And then, she is there. But she isn't. Her presence fills all his senses at once. The sensation is disorienting. Unlimited potential and bottomless despair filling his chest. She is a vision manifested. He is helpless against her. Her light is blinding, but he genuinely fears that she will vanish if he looks away. She is impossible to comprehend and not meant to be understood. He knows she isn't real, but cannot deny that she is there.
So Strange. So Beautiful.

STRANGE & BEAUTIFUL

STRANGE AND BEAUTIFUL
HAUNTED AND WONDERFUL
HIDDEN FROM SIGHT
BY THE VEIL OF THE NIGHT

SILVER IN MY VEINS
MOLTEN BY HER TOUCH
WISHING THAT SHE
WAS HERE REACHING FOR ME

AND SO IT BEGINS
KISSES OF LAVENDER WIND
SHADOWS OF SORROW
NOW RUNNING FOR COVER
AND I WON'T NEED TO CAST THEM AGAIN

SHE IS STRANGE AND BEAUTIFUL
RELENTLESS AND PERPETUAL
IF I OUTRAN MY FEAR
WOULD SHE FOLLOW ME HERE?

ILLUSION AND MIRACLE
WOUNDED AND INVULNERABLE
WHY SHOULDN'T THERE BE
SOMEONE TRAPPED BESIDES ME?

AND SO IT BEGINS
KISSES OF LAVENDER WIND
SHADOWS OF SORROW
NOW RUNNING FOR COVER
AND I WON'T NEED TO HIDE THERE AGAIN

I FEEL STRANGE AND BEAUTIFUL
SPECTRE AND SPECTACLE
CHANGES OF MIND
SOMEHOW FADING BEHIND ME

TOUCHED AND UNTOUCHABLE
NOTHING IS IMPOSSIBLE
LOSING MY HOLD
ON THE THINGS I'VE BEEN TOLD

AND SO IT GOES ON
WAITING IN BLINDNESS FOR DAWN
SHOULDN'T THERE BE
SOMEONE LOOKING FOR ME?
I DON'T THINK I'LL RUN FROM THIS ONE
I WON'T NEED TO RUN FROM THIS ONE

The fog lifts once again this time cut and dispersed by limelight. He is on a stage sweating and screaming and doing battle of a different kind. Standing at the center of a swirling vortex, loud and

punishing. Billowy smoke and blinding lights. He feels only his own voice, rising and falling he is a feather floating on the maelstrom. Steely yet fragile it seems in danger of being torn apart at any second yet it carries his spirit outward and upward. Ascending and diving again. The music speaks to him. It asks only to live. To be given life. He wills it into the air. It comes crashing into the room. Never having existed at all until that moment. The players on the stage work as one to bring this music to life. They all feel as though they were meant to live this moment. As if born to Live The Sound.

LIVE THE SOUND

I'M READY - READY FOR THE WAR
WAITING LIKE A WEAPON
I'M SCREAMING - SCREAMING AT THE DOOR
WAILING LIKE A DRAGON

ALWAYS MARCHED WITHOUT A DRUM
ALWAYS KNEW WHAT I'D BEGUN
ALWAYS NEEDED YOU TO GET LEFT BEHIND

I LIVE THE SOUND
THE ROAR OF DESPERATION
THE CUT OF SOMETHING FOUND

I LEFT THE GROUND
THE HEARTBEAT BREAKS THE ANVIL
THE WRECKAGE THEY SURROUND

I'M HOLDING - HOLDING MY DESPAIR
MOVING FROM THE OUTSIDE
NO DREAMING - DREAMING OF THE DARK
BURNING FROM THE INSIDE

NEVER NEEDED TO KNOW WHY
NEVER NEEDED TO COMPLY
NEVER NEEDED YOU TO MAKE UP MY MIND

I LIVE THE SOUND
THE DOORWAY TO ASCENSION
IS STILL FOR ME TO FIND

I LEFT THE GROUND
FOR LIVING IN DECEPTION
HAS MADE ME CHANGE MY MIND

I'M HEARING - HEARING ALL THE SOUNDS
THEY ARE HERE TO GUIDE ME
I'M LEARNING - THE WEAPON I HAVE FOUND
MUST BECOME THE KEY

EVEN SOLDIERS MUST DECIDE
SOMEONE LOSES WHEN THEY DIE
THE DOOR WAS ALWAYS HERE FOR ME TO FIND
I WILL LEAVE THE KEY BEHIND

Once again in that battle room, he perceives a giant vessel in the center of the space. It feels much larger in Here now, but the air is stifling with heat and fatigue. The vast iron container is scorching and wreathed in fire and Robin feels that he might burst into flames if he approaches it. The sword speaks to him again. *"I have guided you here. And you have accepted your own trust to face your fears. You have given yourself a great gift. But you are still trapped here. You must let go of the struggle. It holds you*

back, keeps you still, holds joy at arm's length. You have no further need of a weapon. You must remake me in order to move on." Robin knows what he must do. But he is afraid. The Sword came to him when he needed it most. It gave him courage. Made him stronger. Helped him fight. He feels loyalty, even friendship to it.

But then he realizes that life is ever changing and must do so in order to continue.

Approaching the fire, he holds the Sword aloft and blade first thrusts it into the bowl.

At first he feels alone, despairing, defeated. He watches it gradually disappearing into a glowing scarlet flow.

All at once the Crucible disappears from view. The room is quiet and still.

CRUCIBLE

FIRE BY THE LIGHT OF DISILLUSION
THE CRUCIBLE WAITS FOR ME
A VESSEL OF MENDING TO ALTER MY ENDING
THE PATHWAY TO SET ME FREE

FED BY THE HEAT OF ABSOLUTION
THE WEIGHT OF MY FATE IS SEALED
GUIDED BY VOICES WHISPERING CHOICES
THE DOORWAY HAS BEEN REVEALED

I CAN'T GO ON NOT BEING THE MAN I'VE BECOME
NO WHERE TO RUN - NOT SEEING THE SKY FOR THE SUN

HELD IN THE GRIP OF RESIGNATION
I AM HERE TO REMAKE MY SWORD
UNLOCKING THE GATES OF POSSIBLE FATES
A FUTURE I'M MOVING TOWARD

I AM THE ONE WHO LET MY DESIGNS COME UNDONE
THE END HAS BEGUN RETURNING TO WHERE I COME FROM

FORGED IN THE FIRES OF RETRIBUTION
THE STEEL KNOWS IT'S MEANT TO BE
CRIMSON AND GLOWING - MOLTEN AND FLOWING
THE ANSWER IS PLAIN TO ME
THE BLADE HAS BECOME THE KEY

THE ANSWER IS KNOWN
TO THE ONE WHO LEFT US HERE ALONE
THE TIMING IS WRONG
FOR THE LOST WHO COULD NOT MOVE ALONG

NOTHING TO IT - SEE YOUR WAY
AND THEN MOVE ON
IT'S OKAY - YOU CAN DO IT
THERE'S A WAY TO MOVE ON

IF I'D ONLY KNOWN
IT WAS ALWAYS HERE
I COULD NOT BE SHOWN
HOW TO LIVE WITH FEAR

IN STARTING OUT THERE
AND ENDING UP HERE

IF I'D ONLY KNOWN

IT WAS ALWAYS HERE
IT WAS ALWAYS HERE

No voices now. Just still calm and cooling night air smelling slightly of flowers and dew through open windows at either side.

The moonlight streaming in lights a large Key on the floor where the cauldron had been. Visible in front of him the shape of a weathered wooden door can be seen, more moonlight defining its uneven edges.

Battered iron hinges matching the knob and keyhole are covered with age and patina. Robin lifts the key from its place on the floor. It's very light in weight and feels familiar. Approaching the door the lighting from behind comes brighter and more focused. The door and key are gently humming in harmony becoming unison as he closes the distance.

Robin sits silently for a good long while, reflecting on all the obstacles he fought past made even more hard to overcome by them being of his own design. He feels *good*. In a way that he can't recall feeling. The Ghosts are gone. All that remains is the voice inside urging him to go on. The Key speaks. *"I have guided you, but you allowed yourself to be guided. This part of our journey together is done. I will remain Here and you will find your way."*

The Key becomes suddenly very heavy. The voice has left it but Robin feels that it is still with him. Inside him. He turns deliberately and kneels to place the Key in the moonlight on the floor. He hopes to himself that should anyone else become trapped in that place it will help them as it did for him. Recalling all that he has been through on this voyage, he give thanks for the sense of inner courage he discovered while Surrounded By Ghosts.

SURROUNDED BY GHOSTS

SITTING ALONE IN THAT DARK PLACE
COLLECTING THE UNANSWERED CALLS
ANOTHER FEW LINES ON THAT STRANGE FACE
AND STARING DOWN CRACKS IN THE WALLS

BUT THIS TIME THAT I'M WASTING
DOESN'T BELONG IN MY HEAD
AND THIS WINE THAT I'M TASTING
WON'T HELP ME TO RISE FROM THE DEAD

SLEEPING IN SHADOWS THAT NEED ME
KNEE DEEP IN YESTERDAY'S RAIN
CHAINS ON MY HEART HAVEN'T FREED ME
EXISTING JUST OUTSIDE THE FRAME

BUT THE TORCH I'VE BEEN HOLDING
IS BURNING THE SHAPE THAT I'M IN
AND THE FLAME THAT IS SCOLDING
SEEMS A BIT CLOSE TO THE SKIN

STANDING ALONE IN THIS DARK PLACE
NO LONGER SURROUNDED BY GHOSTS
THE HAND THAT I HOLD WEARS A NEW FACE
THE ONE THAT I NEEDED THE MOST

BUT IT'S TIME THAT I'M LEAVING
THE LAST OF MY PHANTOMS HAVE GONE
AND THE ONES THAT I'M GRIEVING
WON'T LEAVE ME ALONE FOR TOO LONG

I'M STANDING ALONE IN THIS LOST PLACE
THE ONE THAT I MADE FOR MYSELF
I'M LEARNING TO LIVE WITH MY TRUE FACE
THE ONE WITH NEW STORIES TO TELL

I'M TIRED OF HOLDING ME DOWN HERE
I'VE FASHIONED A WAY TO GET FREE
I'M LETTING MYSELF LET IT GO NOW
AND FORGIVING FOR GIVING THE KEY
TO ME

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