

Crystalyn Delgado
Literary Genre II: Horror, Mystery, and Suspense

“Oh my god! Did you guys hear about that new speakeasy that just opened on Locust?” Meena raved to her friends, her hands making big motions as she talked about the *amazing* music, the *amazing* drinks they had, and the *amazing* atmosphere. Everything with Meena was *amazing*, but the lack of variety in her vocabulary didn’t keep me from wanting to impress her.

“She said that speakeasy was on Locust, right?” I asked my friend, Danny, as he poked at a piece of tasteless cardboard that was supposed to pass as honey-baked ham.

“Yeah, why?” He asked, tossing his fork onto the plate. “You’re gonna go?” his lips crept up into a smirk.

“Uhm, maybe.” I felt a blush crawling up my neck.

“Oh please, Elliot. You? going to Locust by yourself? Yeah, right.” He chuckled a bit and went back to poking at the more edible bits of his meal.

“You never know! Maybe I’m feeling spontaneous.” I shrugged.

And that ‘spontaneity’ walked me all the way to the not-so-great part of the city and in front of what I assumed was an abandoned apothecary shop. It looked like it hadn’t been touched since the 1800s, aside from the occasional teenager who wanted a bit of adventure and broke in.

When I pushed the door open, I felt like I was choking on the stale, dusty air filling the room. The room I stood in was empty except for the counter and shelves littered with glittering shards of glass. As I surveyed the room, I could hear the chittering of the rats in the rafters above my head; then, the most beautiful music I’d heard in my twenty years of life began to play.

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I felt like the music took control of me, putting my mind at ease and guiding me into a room far back in the building where I saw a man dressed in a coat so long that when he sat, the hem brushed against the floor, sweeping a small semi-circle into the thick dust that coated the platform. His long hair was like an oil spill, a stark contrast to the sickliness of his skin. But none of that was what drew me in. It was the beauty of the music he played on the most gorgeous cello I'd ever seen. It was nothing I'd ever experienced. I felt every facet of life sewn deep into the music. It said everything about life, death, happiness, anger, love, and everything else life had to offer, being revealed and enchanting me with every note.

I felt like a ghost, drifting through the crowd and sitting at the center of the room, never taking my eyes away from his fingers as they danced along the strings.

There was nothing special about what he was doing with his body to put such emotion into the music, so it had to be the cello itself. The wood was the color of fresh ash, and the scroll whittled into the shape of a face with a look of terror eternalized in the wood. It was breathtaking.

I sat there for hours listening to the sorrowful melodies the cellist played. With every note, I felt like the cello whispered to me, begging to tell me secrets so special that no one else could possibly know them. I couldn't see underneath the shadow of his wide-brim top hat, but I felt his gaze scorching my soul.

I sat there entranced until I heard the bartender. "Last call!"

It felt like I'd just arrived, but when I looked around, I was the only patron left, and the clock on the wall now read 3:47.

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“Come on, kid. You don’t gotta go home, but you can’t stay here.” The bartender said, polishing the bar.

“Oh, uhm...” I glanced over at the cellist, who silently packed away the beautiful instrument and left the stage without a word, abandoning the instrument. “Can I use the bathroom first?”

The bartender sighed, “Sure, kid, but make it quick. Down the hall, last door on your left.”

I hurried down the hall, slamming the door to the bathroom and flicking the light on. I couldn’t leave this place. I just watched the most beautiful performance I’d ever seen. My playing could never compare to anything like that. I had to get the man’s autograph. No...what made the music special wasn’t him...I wanted that cello...no...I *needed* that cello.

I turned back toward the door, taking a deep breath as I grabbed the doorknob, slowly turning it so no one would hear me, and crept back down the hall. When I returned to the bar, the bearded tender was nowhere in sight, as well as the cellist who left his instrument in a wooden case, the same ashen color as the beautiful cello.

Taking one last look around the room, I slowly edged around the wall and onto the stage, gently running my finger along the curves of the case. My breathing was erratic, and it felt like every part of my body vibrated as I slipped my fingers underneath the handle and began to lift it off the stage.

“Hey! Where do you think you’re going with that?”

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The voice sounded nothing like the red-headed bartender from earlier. I turned, slowly putting the cello case on the floor, and there stood the cellist who played the beautiful music. The one that left the cello abandoned in this room.

“You left this here...how could you leave something so beautiful behind?” I murmured, picking the case back up.

“It doesn’t matter where I leave it. It’s *mine!*” He lunged at me, his calm, piercing demeanor gone—a viscous, animal-like ferocity in its place.

I fell back as he grabbed for me, a dull pain shooting through my tailbone as I slammed ass-first into the brick-laid floor. I scrambled backward, regaining my footing, the case still in hand.

As he kept lunging at me, I could almost feel the case begging me to take it away from there. Protect it with my life. Don’t stop until it’s mine...and that’s exactly what I did. With aggression I’d never felt before, I swung the case with all my might, slamming it into his skull, a sickening crunch filling the room before he fell to the ground. I gently placed the cello on the ground, plopping down on his body, causing him to let out a strained groan. I brushed away the hair that fanned along his forehead, seeing the blood dribbling from the wound on his right temple.

“Please...Please...I need it...I can’t live without it...” His voice was raspy and weak, and his eyes stared past me in a daze. I felt nothing but disgust at his pitiful pleading.

“I have a better idea.” I pried a loose brick from the floor, turning it over in my hand a few times before raising it over my head. His eyes focused on the brick above him.

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“Thank you.” He rasped out as I brought the brick down. I slammed the brick into his temple, one...two...three...four times. I almost couldn’t stop myself until I felt the warmth of his blood on my hands and cheeks.

I snapped out of my trance, panicked at the scene I’d just created. I flung the brick away, snatched up the cello case, and ran. I’d never run so fast in my life. I didn’t stop until I was in my room, my lungs feeling like they’d burst.

I threw my prize onto my bed, letting it bounce along to a stop as I panicked in thought. Would the police get me? They definitely would. The bartender knew I was still in there. My fingerprints are still on the brick, I’m sure. Can you pull fingerprints off a brick? I’m a murderer...I need to be in jail...I couldn’t even cry because...I didn’t even feel bad. I was more worried about getting caught than the man I’d killed.

With a sigh and a shrug, I looked into my mirror, staring at the flecks of blood that decorated my cheeks. I looked down at my bloodied hands, inspecting them like I’d just gotten a fresh manicure. I shrugged again and pushed into the bathroom, washing away that night’s evidence the cellist left on my body, washing him away.

I lovingly admired my prize when I stepped back into my room. My heart was so full because it was mine.

It had been a few weeks since I had stolen my cello, and every day with it was better than the last...until it wasn’t.

When I first played it, I had visions of what I wanted most— Meena and being a world-renowned cellist—It sometimes showed me the desires of others who watched me while I

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played. Many were innocent. Danny wanted to be a wealthy CEO of his own tech company, and Meena wished to open up a non-profit animal rehabilitation center, but some weren't always so innocent. My father wanted to run away with his boss, Ruby, the one my mother always suspected of being a little too close to my father at company Christmas parties. My mother's deepest desire opened the door for the darker desires that resided deep in the pits of others' souls. She desired to tie Ruby to the chair I sat in as I played for my family and make her regret every stolen glance and every hug that lasted just a bit too long and wanted to sit and wait until my father came home to see her handiwork.

Things continued to spiral from there. After watching how my mother desired to bring Ruby to her death, I now started seeing the deaths of others. They weren't the desires of anyone in particular. Still, when I'd play alone, the music whirling around the room, telling me the deepest and darkest of life's secrets, I'd see the deaths of acquaintances like my eighth-grade English teacher who, in my vision, drowned in her swimming pool after getting tangled in the tarp that covered it when she fell in. A few days after I had that vision, I received the news that she'd passed away, and when I heard Meena relay the details to her friends at lunch, she was painting a picture of the brutal death from my vision.

I kept hearing the news of deaths that I'd already seen. It must have been taking a toll on me because one day, Meena, of all people, looked at me as if she'd seen a ghost after not having been at school for a week, so enamored with my new love.

"Oh my god, Elliot, what happened to you?"

"What are you talking about?"

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“El...your hair looks like it’s falling out. You’ve gotten so pale and look like you haven’t slept in days!”

Meena was right. It’s because I hadn’t slept. I’d spend every day playing my cello through the night. Despite the horrors it showed me, I just couldn’t stop. I needed to see more. I needed to know every detail, and even when I tried to sleep, I’d dream of the cello, hearing it call out to me from somewhere in the void of my dreams, and I’d have to wake up and satiate our mutual hunger to play and be played. It’s like the cello was a wild beast constantly on the brink of starvation, needing to be fed endlessly, and I was at its mercy, feeding it until my fingers bled and my eyes would no longer focus out of exhaustion.

But one day, as I played another concert to no one but the secrets the cello would moan aloud, I began to see another vision: my siblings, seven-year-old Amelia and my twin brother, Ezra, piling into the car with my parents. I watched as fragments flashed before my eyes. The car, the missed red light, the driver going too fast to stop, the *crash, crunch, SLAM* of vehicles colliding, crushing the side where Ezra and my father sat, my mother gasping for air as shards of glass left gashes in her beautiful face, I never got the chance to see Amelia because I flung the cello away from me, the sound of my heart thudding in my ears louder than anything else I’d ever heard. My legs trembled until they fell out from beneath me. I gasped, my lungs begging to grab any air they could find.

I couldn’t let this happen. I couldn’t lose Ezra. My best friend from before we’d even been born. Amelia, the sweet little girl who always knew to make me smile, and my parents, even with their flaws, I couldn’t lose them. I needed to fix this. I needed to prevent this. I slammed myself down in front of my computer, my fingers flying across the keyboard as I

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searched for hours for anything remotely similar to my cello. I tried to ignore it, begging me to pick it up and see more beautiful secrets. I searched until my eyes burned, and right when I was going to give up and burn it, I saw it.

Canticum mortis. A song of death, that's what it was called. Legends said it showed those who played it the deepest, darkest secrets of the world around them, even the deaths to come. Legend says the only way to relieve themselves of these visions and the fates they bring is to pass them to another soul enchanted by its song. So that's what I did. I dragged the cello to my school, setting myself up in the courtyard's center where all the students milled about and gave the performance of a lifetime. I played a one-man symphony so beautiful it brought me to tears. I looked into the crowd, hoping to see myself within them. Some selfish soul so enchanted by my song that they couldn't resist the music that carried secrets no one else could know because now I knew that those who knew them before me were no longer alive to tell them. That was the burden of these beautiful secrets. You'd never get to share them.

Then I saw her. It was Meena. She floated toward me like a ghost, hoping to get as close to my cello as she could. I was sad it had to be her, but I couldn't let my family die because of my selfishness.

"Thank you, Meena," I whispered as I began to reach the end of my song. Seeing the visions of my final moments on this earth.