

**James Hamby, "The Things that Haunt"**

## The Jester

He found you in your crib, and even then  
He grinned and leered, and tested if his grasp  
Could reach your fragile breath, awaiting when  
He'd have your ebbing life within his clasp.

He never left your side—a wispy shade  
Who always filled the corner of your eye.  
Besotted with your coming death, he made  
A joke each time you feared to die.

And now that you are very old, you know  
Your time is near. Each passing day, each single  
Hour you seem to hear his coxcomb jingle,  
Sense his footsteps follow where you go.

At last the final rattle in your chest—  
For you the end, for him the greatest jest.

## Rostrum

Those hidden things you shouldn't seek—  
The browser history, the octopus beak;

That slimy something in the dark,  
The stranger's candy at the park,

That hidden sin, that one desire  
Which burns inside you like a fire;

That feeling that you've gone too far,  
Your hand inside the cookie jar;

Then clutched by grasping suction cups,  
Pulled to the beak and eaten up.

## Crone

She stands there on the bank, half ghoul, half crone,  
With leering grin that sickens, chills my heart.  
The current pulls the boat to my foregone  
Reunion with this creature of the dark.

So many times I've met her here before—  
This gorgon of my dreams—and every time  
As I approach and quiver at her sneer  
The dream-confusion maelstrom pulls me in  
Again to other nightmares. Yet she weaves  
Through every dream and morphs into each face,  
But then I drift away, and as I leave  
I shudder at her grinning, taunting gaze.

And in the missing portion of that dream  
I wonder what it was she did to me.

## Skull

Inside the head, the skull;  
Inside the skull, the rot.  
The boy tried not to think of it,  
But found that he could not.

His sister warned him of the dead,  
To her their plight was play:  
“They’re buried all beneath our feet—  
You’ll never get away.”

And so the dead would cling to him  
And tear his skull apart,  
Until he learned to bear them all  
Upon his blackened heart.

And in the silence of the night  
He’d whisper every name,  
Praying that they’d never come  
But grateful when they came.

“Why have you called us to this room?  
You’re just a little boy—  
Such corpses should delight you not,  
Decay should bring no joy.”

But now the boy had disappeared,  
As rot spread through his frame.  
A rancid skull grinned from his bed  
And loved eternal blame.