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Epic-Carteret Episode 6 Summer Spirits 2024

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[Intro Music with Gulls]

Autumn Ware welcomes guests to Winter Hauntings 2024

Welcome to Winter Hauntings, an evening of ghost stories with EPIC Carteret.

I'm Autumn Ware, and I'll be your host for the evening.

Tonight, we're gathered as generations have gathered before us – to celebrate artists who have shrunk the specters of our imagination to a manageable size and put them to work for us as entertainment on a long, moonless January evening.

Wherever humans have lived, we have left behind ghosts and ghost stories - about the people we miss, the things we long for, and the fates we fear. Ghosts acted as guides to Gilgamesh and Odysseus. Hamlet was called to action by the shade of his murdered father, and Charles Dickens made hauntings a part of the winter holiday tradition when he wrote *A Christmas Carol*.

We enjoy being afraid, given the right circumstances. Around a fire. Under a blanket. With a favorite beverage and a cookie. At our grandmother's knee. In the company of friends.

Storytellers – whether they're writers, filmmakers, actors, poets, or singer-songwriters – allow us to face declawed beasts, to enjoy the excitement of toothless terrors, and to practice bravery without bruises.

A well-crafted horror story puts our own daily horrors in perspective. The unknown bard behind Beowulf could keep mental sea monsters at bay as long as the audience would listen, and Stephen King can put monster mortgages on our modern mind's backburner – for a little while.

And so we've learned over the centuries to appreciate those people capable of weaving a spell of enchantment around us in the form of a story, and pound for pound of flesh, few stories bring as many thrills and as much magic, as a scary story.

Our collective fears are rich material for storytellers because they can take on an infinite variety of fantastical shapes and forms – werewolves and banshees and ghouls and witches. They allow us to work through difficult social issues symbolically, to confront personal anxieties and taboo desires in a safe space, and to experience a little thrill of titillation when a storyteller succeeds in crafting a truly terrifying twist.

The top contenders in our Winter Hauntings ghost story [contest] this fall accomplish all of these feats in 1,300 words or fewer.

Now, over millennia, each culture has developed its own way of showing appreciation for its master storytellers: cheering, whistling, applause, book deals.

This evening, we're trying to establish a certain atmosphere. We need a dark and stormy night, so when we want to show our appreciation for the immense talent on display, we're going to make it

rain.

I have some talented rainmakers on hand to demonstrate, though I'm sure many of you are already skilled in this elementary school magical practice, so feel free to join in when you understand the assignment.

Uh, my rainmakers, can you please? Okay. We need a really hard rain, c'mon. Okay. Okay? Good. Good.

Now, if it's really good to you, really good, after the performance, not during, after the performance, if it really gets you good, let's have a little bit of rain, if it's really good, I'm going to ask you to just go ahead and howl. Do we have a banshee? Alright. There we go. Good. Everybody understands what we're going tonight.

Perfect. Now, let's practice. Please make it rain for our top three finalists: Willow Redd for her story "A Fireside Chat," Jessi Waugh for her story "Heaven or Hell" – Jessi, you can stand up –and Melissa Kelley for her story "The Causeway."

Their stories tonight will be read by talented actors from Carteret Community Theater, so they can just relax and enjoy their own story, and so we're going to have: Alex Russell, Matt Brooks, and Kimberly Murdoch.

In addition to our writers and actors, we're joined tonight by playwright Doug Miron, who will be performing a classic coastal ghost story, and by Emily and John Carter of Chick 'N' Biscuit. Stand up. Stand up. This is our haunted half-time act, and they're going to be sharing two original ballads that they wrote together specifically for this event in under four months.

Like Dickens and Shakespeare and all the storytellers who haunt our past, we aren't just passing time tonight. We're also setting the stage for future storytellers. Your ticket purchase to Winter Hauntings raised \$800 for Carteret County educator Amanda McCall's epic quest to bring summertime library services to children across our community. So let's give it up for you.

By making books more accessible to children, Amanda is creating future Carteret County writers to give Tom Kies a run for his money.

And speaking of Tom, four very generous judges gave their time and mental energy during one of the most hectic seasons of the year to read a lot of ghost stories and to whittle those submissions down to our winning story.

Please make it rain for murder mystery author and champion of local writers Judge Tom Kies. We have educator and Beaufort Bookstagrammer Judge Tara Sandmann, and librarian and Public Radio East Development Coordinator Judge Caitlin Kuhn.

Our local judges had the challenge of narrowing down the field of stories for our presiding judge, U.K.-based ghost story expert Kelly Shorter, who can only be with us in spirit due to the great distance. I will be acting as Kelly's medium this evening, sharing her thoughts on the strengths of the top three tales.

While the Atlantic Ocean may be an abyss too vast to cross for an evening of ghost stories, on the first new moon of 2024, I sense that the veil between the counties is thinner, and so I am calling into the ether tonight to summon to the haunted lectern the magical muse of mysteries, the high priestess of preternatural poetry, Pamlico County Poet Laureate Malaika King Albrecht, who will lead

us into our evening's entertainment with her poem "Ghosts Don't Haunt Houses." Please welcome Malaika.

Malaika King Albrecht reads "Ghosts Don't Haunt Houses"

Oh, Autumn. I don't think I've ever been welcomed to the stage like that ever. That is fabulous. I want that to be, like, the thing. I also say a mystery has been solved because I got the agenda and it said, "Make it rain." And I wrote back, "Make it rain. Laugh out loud? What?" Now I know what that means. I had confusion what we were supposed to be doing here. I just want to, let's make it rain for Autumn because wow.

I'm hoping this is the first annual, and I just want to thank you all for letting me come up here. I'm already having a blast. This is from my fourth book *The Stumble Fields*, and I didn't realize how haunted I was until I ended up writing so many ghost poems. But I think that all of us stay a little haunted.

"Ghosts Don't Haunt Houses"

Ghosts on the tips
of our tongues
like lost words.
Ghosts graying our hair,
feathering our ears
with endless whispering.

What do they want?
All ghosts have a mission.
One wants to remind you
you were driving that night.

Another wants
to braid white ribbons
into your hair again.

A thousand things you remember,
and not one's
the sound of a voice.

Ghosts fit into the hems
of our black dresses,
into the pocket of our folded,
empty hands when we pray.

And now I get to actually introduce a live pirate. I'm so excited. I saw that in your bio, Douglas. Come on up to the haunted lectern.

Doug Miron reads "The Palatine", also known as "The Blazing Ship of Shackelford"

I don't want to blast everyone. I may not need that too much. I'm going to present a ghost story that goes by various names. Some may heard of The Blazing Ship of Ocracoke or The Blazing Ship of a lot of different places. We're calling it the Blazing Ship of Shackelford. Some of you know me; I do the ghost walks, and so I know lots of ghost stories of the area and most of them start with a historically establishable story, as does this one.

Some time in colonial days, a ship left England. It arrived north of us in America, documented. It left port headed for Charleston, never reached Charleston, never in recorded history, reached any

port. This is what the documented history tells us. The oral history tells us that the ship burst into flames.

I'm going to tell you the story as it is told by a famed American poet, John Greenleaf Whittier, who heard this story, reviewed the historical records, listened to all the tales and put it together this way. John Greenleaf, Whittier, an American poet, Yankee, but otherwise decent man.

From "The Palatine" by John Greenleaf Whittier

Old men mending their nets of twine,
Talk together of dream and sign,
Talk of the lost ship Palatine,—

The ship that, a hundred years before,
Freighted deep with its goodly store,
In the gales of the equinox come ashore.

The eager islanders one by one
Counted the shots of her signal gun,
Heard the crash as she drove straight on!

Into the teeth of death she sped
(May God forgive the hands that fed
The false lights on the signal Head!)

Do you follow me? It's a bit of an aside. Whe you feed a false light, you're lurin' people to think there's a harbor where they're ain't one, and they comes aground.

Down swooped the wreckers, like birds of prey
Tearing the heart of the ship away,
And the dead had never a word to say.

And then, with ghastly shimmer and shine
Over the rocks and the seething brine,
They burned the wreck of the Palatine.

In their cruel hearts, they homeward sped,
"The sea and the rocks are dumb," they said
"There 'll be no reckoning with the dead."

But the year went round, and when once more
Along that foam-white curve of shore
They heard the line-storm rave and roar,

Behold! again, with shimmer and shine,
Over the rocks and the seething brine,
The flaming wreck of the Palatine!

Is there, then, no death for a word once spoken?
Never a deed but left its token
Written on tables never broken?

Ay, the elements subtle reflections give?
And pictures of all the ages live
On Nature's infinite negative,

For even still, on a moonless night,
Tween Wade Shores and Lookout Light
The spectre kindles and burns in sight.

And wise Sound skippers, though skies be fine,
Reef their sails when they see the sign
Of the blazing wreck of the Palatine!

Autum Ware introduces "A Fireside Chat" by Willow Redd

"A Fireside Chat," our first original ghost story of the evening, was written by Willow Redd, a New Bern writer and filmmaker with roots in Carteret County. Judge Kelly Shorter called "A Fireside Chat" "a well-considered story that allowed enough space for the plot to develop. I felt like I was there and exposed to the elements, adding to the edgy atmosphere this story conjured."

"A Fireside Chat" is being read by Alex Russell of Carteret Community Theater.

Alex Russell reads "A Fireside Chat"

Thank you Autumn, Willow.

A Fireside Chat by Willow Redd

Summer was over, and the temperature was finally turning chill in Emerald Isle.

The cold seemed to come later every year. The tourists had all gone home. Things were quiet once again. As I took my usual post-dinner stroll across to the beach side from my home on the sound, I was met with something I'd never seen on this particular stretch of beach. As soon as I crested the public walkway I saw a fire on the beach. Around it there were several people, five from what I could make out. Three were lit by the flame's orange glow while at least two others were simply silhouettes in the dark of the night. I didn't think fires were even legal on the beach, but figured it was one of the oceanside houses that thought of the beach as their own private property. I was just about to turn and make my way back down the wooden walkway when I heard a voice.

"Hey! Come over here and say hello!" The voice was feminine with a hard to place accent.

I immediately started to look around, thinking for sure they couldn't be talking to me.

"Yes, you! Up there on the dune!"

I thought about turning back and heading home, but my curiosity was piqued. I took off my shoes and started to walk down the wooden steps onto the beach. I did love the feel of cool, dry sand between my toes. I slowly made my way over to the fire as these five individuals watched me approach, my maxi skirt brushing the sand and sea grass. As I got closer, I could make out more details of the party. They were all dressed in what seemed like old-fashioned clothing. The three men wore loose dress shirts and simple slacks, while the two women wore similar shirts with long pleated skirts that had been tied up with what seemed like leather strapping.

"Well, hello stranger. And what's your name, lass?" the woman who had called out to me earlier asked.

I wasn't sure about giving her my real name for some reason, so I simply said,

"Ash."

"Pleased to meet you, Ash. I'm Mary. That's 'Lisbeth, Jonathan, Steven, and the morose one over there is Zeke."

"Zeke?" I questioned.

"Zeke," he gruffly responded, crossing his arms and sinking away from the fire and into the dark.

"Don't mind him," Mary said. "He always gets grumpy when the weather gets like this."

"Really?" I said, "This is my favorite time of year."

"Mine too," Mary agreed. "Reminds me of happier days."

I wanted to follow up on what she meant by "happier days," but thought better of it since I'd just met these people and instead asked, "So, what are y'all doing out here?" I pointed towards the nearest beach house. "Live near here?"

Mary looked towards 'Lisbeth and smiled knowingly. Lisbeth smiled back. "Something like that."

The non-committal answer made me feel a little uncomfortable.

"As for what we're doing," 'Lisbeth said, "we're sharing stories by the fire. What else?"

"I do love a good fireside tale," I said. "Wonderful!" Mary exclaimed. "And it's my turn."

She settled into the sand and leaned on 'Lisbeth. I wondered if they were just friends or more than friends.

"So," she began, "there once was a pirate known as Zebediah Black..."

From the darkness, Zeke groaned and leaned back towards the fire. "Why do you always have to tell this story?"

"Ash hasn't heard it," she snapped defensively at Zeke, then turned suddenly to me and asked, "Right, Ash? You haven't heard it."

"Right," I said a little too fast, matching her energy.

She simply turned back to Zeke and stuck her tongue out at him before continuing. "Anyway, Zebediah Black was a pirate, one of the worst to ever sail the seven seas. Not only was he totally ruthless and bloodthirsty, but he also was rumored to have an evil witch on his crew who would raise a storm to aid him in his raids.

"What a lot of people don't know, however, is that this witch would also curse Black's victims, both the living and the dead, to remain on this Earth forever more."

"That... that sounds horrible," I said, feeling a chill that had little to do with the temperature.

"Oh, it is." This came from Steven, only to be immediately hushed by Jonathan and 'Lisbeth.

"The only way for these unfortunate souls to know peace," Mary continued, "is for them to meet up once every fifty years and share their story. They just need to wait for someone to wander towards their fire."

Mary was suddenly right next to me, and I noticed for the first time the seaweed in her hair, the barnacles growing off one of her cheeks. The milky pupils in her eyes. Now that chill went right to my bones. I wanted to get up, to run, but I couldn't seem to get my limbs to follow my orders.

"We were on board a colony ship coming from Ireland. There were only about twenty of us total, and most everything we owned had been sold to pay for our journey across the sea. That didn't matter to someone like Zebediah Black, though. After his crew had boarded our ship and killed the crew, he gathered us on the deck and brought his witch forward. He wasn't happy to learn there was no money to be had, and barely any supplies. We were practically near starvation when he found us, the crew having kept the bulk of the food for themselves, so he decided to put us out of our misery.

"He told the witch to do with us as she pleased. Our parents were simply burned alive as we watched. She liked fire, it seems. Liked the way it roiled across living flesh. She had Black's crew keep the flaming bodies on board, not wanting them to run overboard and put themselves out too soon. The five of us, she decided to tie to the mast and leave us with the burning bodies of our parents around us. By now the timbers of the ship had also caught, and Black aimed a canon towards the ship's hull and fired. Now the ship was simultaneously sinking and burning. The witch told us she wanted to see if we would burn or drown first. She also told us that we would not die,

rather we would continue to wander as spirits so we could, as she put it, 'keep Zebediah's story alive.'"

My throat had gone bone dry, but still I tried to swallow and raspily said, "And now that you've told me your story... what happens?"

Jonathan had, at some point during Mary's story, made his way to my side and now whispered into my ear, "Now you join us."

With that, there was nothing but darkness.

When I came to, the fire was gone, the ghosts were gone, the night was gone. It was very early in the morning and I awoke to the sound of a dog barking. One of the early morning beachcombers and her dog were looking down at me curiously. I merely got up, brushed the sand from myself, and slowly made my way home. While crossing from the beach side to the sound side, I began to wonder if it had all been a dream, but something deep down in my soul told me it wasn't. I sometimes see Mary or 'Lisbeth in the dark, just out of the corner of my eye.

The curse certainly worked, as I would never forget the time I met a few of the unfortunate victims of Zebediah Black.

[Chick 'N' Biscuit perform "**Breaking Old Ground**"]

Emily Carter introduces "Breaking Old Ground"

I need to go home now. Hi, everyone. I'm Emily Carter. I'm a writer...I'm a writer and poet, and in the past few years, a songwriter along with my husband John, who is part of the band Old Age and Treachery. And because in my writing I refer to John as the Smoking Hot Love Biscuit – that he obviously is – when we perform together, we call ourselves Chick 'N' Biscuit. My blog is A Chick's View Dot Com.

So when Autumn said, "Hey, why don't you write a couple songs for Winter Hauntings?" we started exploring all the things we could have written about Carteret County, and it was a lot. So at first we thought we could write one song, and then we decided to write two, and we probably could write a whole album. So maybe that'll happen for the next Winter Hauntings.

So the first song is entitled "Breaking Old Ground," and the inspiration is the old burying ground, which is one of the older cemeteries not only in Carteret County but in the state. And it's interesting to me, all the word people in the room, that it's not burial ground, it's burying ground, which for those of us who are nerds, that's a gerund. And what actually that means is, is it's active. So the 400 block of Ann Street is home to the old burying ground. One of North Carolina's oldest cemeteries in the third, oldest town, a place called Beaufort.

The word Beaufort means "lovely fortress" and the old burying ground corroborates this definition with majestic live oaks providing shade for ancient stones and epitaphs, some of which are weathered beyond recognition. Historians believe that the earliest graves date back to the early

1700s. Nathaniel Taylor dedicated the site to the town in 1731. Beaufort Historic Association offers tours, and with most things, there's an app and a map.

I have a great affection for graveyards, and this one, especially along with the stories represented by that dash between the dates of births and deaths. Our dog Toast and I walk the 400 block of Ann Street almost every day. There are cultures that believe that owls or hearing their hoots symbolizes death, but I love the great horned and barn owls that perch on the steeples of Ann Street Methodist and beckon across the graves to Purvis Chapel. I suspect that these birds are from a lineage that have called across the patch of dirt for 300 years.

Perhaps it's music to the spirit world since they have already faced the Grim Reaper. They don't fill me with fear either. I find their sounds comforting, like a call of hope and peace. Breaking Old Ground is about the Old Burying Ground and those who rest there. Travel with Smokin Hot Love Biscuit by song, and perhaps you'll feel inspired to visit some late afternoon around dusk and be lucky enough to hear the owls. And if you do pause and remember when.

[John Carter performs "**Breaking Old Ground**"]

[Chick 'N' Biscuit performs "**Haint Nothing**"]

Underneath the live oaks, toward the west end of Ann
The Old Burying Ground bears witness, to the bones of many-a-man

With graves facing eastward, for their rise on judgment day
Remembered by verse and statue, marked by marble and clay

There's the little girl with no name, stuck in a barrel of rum
Preserved on a ship in liquor, as a promise to her mum

There's young Vienna Dill, who was only two
Yellow Fever stole her body, as fevers sometimes do

Soldiers rest, done with war
Captains sleep on distant shore
Mothers pass giving birth
Babies follow, fleeing earth
Teachers and preachers, in the great beyond
Families and consorts, their journeys won
Barn owls call from nearby limb
A lonely chorus of remember when

There's Otway Burns of military note
The war of 1812, Snapdragon his boat

That British Officer who died aboard his fleet
Buried upright with boots still laced on his feet

Lafayette Leecraft's grave is marked with broken stone
To symbolize his short life, far too soon gone

John Hill is remembered as pilot of the seas
Last dropping anchor in Beaufort, repose in a gentle breeze

Soldiers rest, done with war
Captains sleep on distant shore
Mothers pass giving birth
Babies follow, fleeing earth

Teachers and preachers, in the great beyond
Families and consorts, their journeys won
Barn owls call from nearby limb
A lonely chorus of remember when

Emily Carter introduces "Breaking Old Ground"

Pirates, a Civil War fort, battles, murders, sinking ships, hurricanes, and the pursuit of wealth on the water. Sounds like a Thomas Kies' movie, book and movie. All are generous lenders to legend and home base for ghostly characters, haunts, some may call them, but known in these here parts as haints. Haint is an old Southern word specific to a ghost or spirit from the North Carolina coast.

Our next song "Haint Nothing" explores spirit lore of Carteret County, including a pirate with dark colored facial hair that you may have heard about, a ghostly warning that came to fruition through murder, and a mermaid-like prophet nicknamed Porpoise Sal, who washed up in a barrel on the shores of Diamond City.

Our house was built in 1898, and in 2018, when our contractor tore out of wall, an all black brogan was found secured along the support beam. Shoes were placed in walls during that era to protect families from this thing called haints. John and I kept the shoe, placing it above the threshold of our bedroom, more out of respect for the shoe and tradition than fear. But I do like a little insurance policy in the form of sensible centenarian footwear.

Are there haints among us? Well, that's for you to decide. If there is a night when the hairs on the back of your neck stand at attention, and you turn around, and no one is there, don't worry, you'll be just fine. Chances are it probably hain't nothin. No, it haint nothing at all.

[John Carter performs "**Breaking Old Ground**"]

My mama named me Edward, my beard was black as soot
Yeah, my mama named me Edward, my beard was black as soot
I set fire to my whiskers, hung on my mast in my boots

I was fierce and ruthless, mean as a pirate can be
Yeah, I was fierce and ruthless, mean as a pirate can be
I burned and pillaged, buried treasures in the sea

It took knives and guns for the Navy to kill me dead
Yeah, it took knives and guns and for the Navy to kill me dead
They celebrated their victory by chopping off my head

If you see a lantern swinging on the beach, along the tide
Yeah, if you see a lantern swinging on the beach, along the tide
Know that it's me, Blackbeard, ain't crossed to the other side

The nights are dark and stormy
As nights often go
Fog set in on the marshland
Shadows hanging low
Could be haints a calling
Or black magic casting net
Ghosts roam and rattle
At this place called Carteret

Fighting at Fort Macon, Ben Combs died in 1862
Yeah, fighting at Fort Macon, Ben Combs died in 1862
His wife Eliza got his pension to help her make it through

Eliza stayed near the Fort, where she once lived with Ben
Yeah, Eliza stayed near the Fort, where she once lived with Ben
When she died, her body was laid in a plot beside of him

A hundred years pass and Eliza rests unheard
Yeah, a hundred pass, and Eliza rests unheard
Then Linda Coats claims Eliza's ghost spoke caution words

Ronald Gray came to Linda's, a soldier needing a phone
Yeah, Ronald Gray came to Linda's, a soldier needing a phone
He went and murdered Linda, as Eliza once had warned

The nights are dark and stormy
As nights often go
Fog set in on the marshland
Shadows hanging low
Could be haints a calling
Or black magic casting net
Ghosts roam and rattle
At this place called Carteret

Diamond City was a whaling town, that is surely true
Yeah, Diamond City was a whaling town, that is surely true
Slaying those beasts for blubber was all they ever knew

Porpoise Sal was a beauty, washed up in a flowing gown
Yeah, Porpoise Sal was a beauty, washed up in a flowing gown
She said to stop the killing, or they were all going down

Diamond City didn't listen to the girl's prophecy
Yeah, Diamond City didn't listen to the girl's prophecy
A hurricane fell upon them, washed their houses out to sea

The nights are dark and stormy
As nights often go
Fog set in on the marshland
Shadows hanging low
Could be haints a calling
Or black magic casting net
Ghosts roam and rattle
At this place called Carteret

Emily Carter introduces Malaika King Albrecht back to the Haunted Lectern

Next, we have a poet visiting all the way over from Pamlico County. Let's welcome Malaika.

Malaika King Albrecht reads "When I Sleep"

This is so much fun, guys. I really appreciate it. I'm going to be reading "When I Sleep." It's a short poem.

“When I Sleep” by Malaika King Albrecht

“When I sleep”

The ghost holds my breath as hostage,
wants me to swallow the dove
to start summer over
and say yes to sunburns again.

He says, Angels fly into the sun every day,
so why not light this house?
This is how all fires begin:
A man, a match & something to burn.

I can’t stop the horses from running,
and I can only run in place. Frozen
I hear a red crocus pierced the snow.
Everywhere is melting.

Autumn Ware introduces “Heaven or Hell” by Jessi Waugh

“Heaven or Hell” – Girl, you better sit down because this is going to be your story – “Heaven or Hell” was written by Carteret County native Jessi Waugh, who spearheaded an upcoming Poetry in Plain Sight event through Friends of the Bogue Banks Library. Judge Kelly Shorter said, “When this story got going, I was completely lost in it. It was ambiguous and unexpected and turned everything upside down with one brilliant twist!”

“Heaven or Hell” is being read tonight by Matt Brooks of Carteret Community Theater.

Matt Brooks reads “Heaven or Hell”

It was December, in that no-man’s land between Christmas and New Year’s Day, when time dissolves into an ether of torn gift wrappings, dry pine needles, and stale sugar cookies. Resolutions float in lazy circles like dust motes that haven’t settled. One year is dead, the next not yet born. It’s a kind of purgatory between the sins of holiday excess and the promises of the new year. Will it be heaven or hell? Too soon to tell.

The kids were out of school, half the world was closed, and Carla drifted in a gray fog – unmoored and unsure of which way to go. She walked Atlantic Beach, placing one foot in front of the other, without a destination in mind. At her side, her best friend Suzanne matched her pace precisely.

For the past mile, Carla had poured her heart out to Suzanne – her desire to leave her husband and kids, all the fun and passion she shared with her secret boyfriend John, her disgust with her current life and lies. She just couldn’t go on anymore.

From the south, an unseasonable wind ruffled Carla's long, wavy hair. Once a dark mocha color, it had gone prematurely gray, creating a swirling storm cloud around her face.

"I can't leave Mark," Carla said in a voice breaking like the crashing of waves. "It would destroy him. And I still love him, in a way. More importantly, it would hurt the kids. John isn't as good with kids, and he has a record, you know. I wouldn't get custody; I wouldn't even try."

She inhaled the salt air and exhaled through an open mouth. "But I can't stay away from John. I've tried, and I can't. He makes me feel alive. I don't feel that anymore with Mark. I don't feel it anymore without Mark, either – just when I'm with John. And I need to feel alive. Do you know what I mean, Suzanne?"

Suzanne remained quiet a moment, and Carla listened to the sound of their old running shoes crunching softly on the low-tide sand. Conditions were perfect for a beach walk – firm, flat, slightly damp. Bits of shell, seaweed, and marine life lay strewn along their path, washed up from a recent storm, but they did not stop to comb the shore. They passed by even the finest flotsam and shells. They walked on, their legs swinging in time like a singular entity.

"Leave him," Suzanne said. "The kids will get over it. They'll be fine with their dad, and it's not like you'll never see them again. There'll be visits, lots of visits. You should be happy, Carla. If you're not happy, they won't be either. You say John makes you feel alive? Well, that's what's important. You can't survive if you feel dead. Plus, I'll be there. You know I'll be there to help however I can."

Suzanne's words made Carla's heart skip a beat. There was the permission she'd been looking for, and from an older, wiser friend. Suzanne was ten years Carla's senior, but she didn't look it. Her hair remained a shade of Irish Cream blonde, poured fluidly over light coffee skin without even one wrinkle. She'd never had kids or a husband. She could do whatever she wanted, whenever she wanted. Sometimes, Carla envied her.

Carla's eyes traveled heavenward, searching for one last bit of resolve to stay with her family, but the clouds obscured all light from above. The sky was gray, the ocean was gray, and even the sand was gray.

"Maybe you're right," she said. "Or maybe, there is no right and wrong. There's just us, and the little bits of joy we squeeze from our lives. I'm not helping anyone by staying miserable. Mark and the kids will be better off without me. I'll tell them when I get home today. Thanks for helping me decide, Suzanne. I just hope I have the strength for it."

Suzanne stopped walking and pulled Carla into a strong embrace.

"Here, take my strength," she said.

As Suzanne's strong arms wrapped around her, Carla's gaze fell past Suzanne's shoulder, back the direction they'd walked along the shore.

Carla stared. She took a sharp inhale, and a shiver ran along her spine. It ran along the top of her scalp, down her fingertips, through her toes, and into the wet sand.

Stretching behind them was a path of footprints in the sand. One set of footprints. Just one. They were not the imprints of bare feet. They were not the imprints of old running shoes. They were sets of two slightly pointy ovals, tilting in toward each other – they were cloven hoofprints.

Suzanne's breath was hot in Carla's ear as she whispered, "It was then that I carried you."

Autumn introduces "The Causeway" by Melissa Kelley

Our final original story of the evening "The Causeway" was written by Cedar Point-based aviator and Carteret Writers president Melissa Kelley. Judge Kelly Shorter said, "This story blew me away, like an errant sea mist. The tension was pitch perfect. Who knew you didn't need to be in an eerie Scottish Castle to have the wits scared out of you!?"

"The Causeway" is being read by Kimberly Murdoch of Carteret Community Theater.

Kimberly Murdoch reads "The Causeway"

My foot withdrew from the gas pedal as my unease grew. My eyes tried in vain to distinguish anything in the indiscriminate mist. I should be near the top of the bridge, but everything that lay ahead was obscured in a dense, gray fog. It was the kind of fog that made me glad my windows were up, otherwise it might creep into my car and obscure me too.

No lights from the barrier island penetrated the shroud of the thick marine layer. I could be in another world.

Finally a light eased out of the haze. Then the lights of the businesses along the road emerged and I found my turn.

I parked in the meager glow of the parking lot light. I wanted its protective sheen at quitting time with this fog. I pulled open the door of the Topsy Turtle and my unsettled thoughts bumped into Pete's quiet comfort, his lack of concern for meteorological matters.

"Evenin' Pete. It sure is thick out there.

"Shore is Gloria." Pete drew out the few words he said in his own unique drawl. He was the least garrulous bar owner I'd ever met.

The foggy spring had everyone talking. Meteorologists were saying things like water temperature inversion and stalled fronts. Boat captains were saying they would have to upgrade their radar. But there was some other talk, about how it was because the big hurricane last September had dislodged some uneasy spirits when it dragged the sand they rested in out to sea. Pete was as certain of the cause of the fog as he was certain that it didn't bother him none.

"Now they's a wanderin' again, instead of tucked up tight in the land. They won't bother you so long as you keep to your own mind."

It was a slow night until the door opened to a customer we called \$25-Betty. She only spent \$25, and if something got her riled up she was inclined to order an extra drink instead of leaving a tip. Last night it was Annoying-Out-of-Town-Guy that had caused Betty to drink through her tip money. "Sorry honey, you know I only got \$25 to spend what with my fixed income and all, and tonight I need another after dealing with that bozo." I understood, but every tip counted.

Driving home that night, the fog pressed against my windshield. What if the bridge didn't emerge as I drove on? Are all those people that went missing on foggy nights just folks the mist sent elsewhere? The red haze of the stoplight emerged and I shook my head clear.

We hadn't seen \$25-Betty for a few nights when she blew in on a Thursday looking like she had aged ten years. She settled onto her stool and said, "I'll take a whisky on the rocks. With what's been going on, it's going to be at least a \$35 night."

"Sure thing, Betty." I set the drink in front of her. "Wanna talk about it?"

"I don't know what more to say. A couple from my church is missing after they went over the bridge for dinner and didn't make it back on one of them foggy nights."

"Accident?"

"No one knows. They sent a text to their daughter in Durham after dinner, but no one has been able to reach them since. The daughter came down Tuesday and can't find any trace of them. The Police can't neither."

"I hope they turn up."

"I'll take another whiskey."

Pete seemed so unconcerned, I felt he must know more than he let on. But despite working for him for almost a year, he still clammed up whenever I tried any topic other than the bar. While refilling the lemon slices, I casually asked, "Pete, what do you think about the people that have disappeared?"

"I don't know my dear. Mightn be that them restless spirits are turnin' some mischief."

Before I could ask him what he meant, Pete moved toward a weathered man at the end of bar. He looked like he knew some stuff too. I edged that way, wiping down the bar, and overheard them talking about the missing charter boat. The Sue Marie had headed out before sunrise last week. No one saw them out at the fishing holes, and no one had seen them since. The Coast Guard was still searching but from the look on Pete's face, he didn't think they would be found.

"They must a gone through." I caught the customer saying as I pretended to ignore them, concentrating on polishing the bar top.

"Lor help them if they did." Pete looked up and saw me and then looked back to the customer with an expression that said they were done talking.

I didn't get anything else from Pete that night and I headed home over the bridge, my unsatisfied curiosity unsettling my stomach. I usually loved going over the bridge. From its highest point you could see all the way to the port, and even some of Beaufort. But going over the bridge in the fog was a more inward experience. I caught myself slowing as I reached the top. Suspended in the mist, I felt an urge to stop. Then I saw headlights breaking through and put my foot on the gas.

Even in the off season, Friday nights were usually good at the Turtle. The weekend forecast was sunny, but the fog still lingered, the bridge disappearing ahead of me. I hope they get these bridge lights fixed soon. The hurricane got them too. Without the lights it made going over the bridge feel like heading down the throat of a misty monster.

Thump thump.

What could I have hit? I pulled over, barely seeing the railing as I got the car as close to the side as I dared. I hope these hazard lights are enough for folks to see me.

My mind uneasy, I stepped out and walked around the car. No damage, but there was a traffic cone just ahead of my bumper. Did they start fixing the lights already?

I walked a few yards ahead and saw another cone. Looking back to where I knew my car was I could see only the faintest glimmer of its flashing lights. I had better get going soon, before another car comes and slams right into mine.

I took one more glance toward Atlantic Beach and saw a glimmer of something. Was someone else stopped up here? I took a few more steps but it didn't get any brighter. I should go back and get my car. But each step felt easier and I kept going. A deep breath of the salty air placated the worries dotting my thoughts. The glimmer got brighter and my feet kept moving toward it. I felt only a numbing contentment spreading outward from my lungs. The glimmer became a reflection, like one in an antique mirror.

Something wasn't quite right but there was a warm flood of reassurance that drew me onward.

In the distance a bird cawed and Pete's gruff voice echoed in my ear, "them spirits are turning some mischief." It was enough to rent the curtain of assurance and stop my feet. My sepia reflection morphed into fun house illusion and I turned and ran. Pulling away in my car, I hit another cone but kept accelerating until I saw the first muffled lights from the other side pushing through the mist.

Parked under the light I could see the Topsy Turtle. I mustered the courage to make it across the parking lot, opened my door and ran.

As I pulled the door closed behind me and turned my flushed face toward the bar, Pete gave me a knowing look.

"Glad you chose this side."

Autum Ware brings Winter Hauntings to a close

We're actually ahead of schedule. That may be a problem for some of you, but in fact, this, tonight, this may surprise you, but this is actually kind of a nightmare for me because if you listen to Epic Carteret, you know that I am a reformed recluse and reformed means that, you know, it's not your natural state. So being at an event after dark, for instance, is not my normal state. Hosting an events is most assuredly not my normal state.

One of the best things about telling scary stories with friends is that it reminds us that we've got people around us who can help us get through our darkest nights, and I couldn't imagine a better group of friends to face my own personal fears with, so thank you all for being here tonight.

Thank you for coming out to be a part of this community, whether you showed up as a guest, a sponsor, or an artist, you helped make our first EPIC Carteret event truly EPIC.

Don't forget you have - not just three - you have the top five stories from the ghost story contest in your program tonight. So if you flip through that, you will see that you have the top three and then you have two stories that received honorable mention.

So make sure you also read those stories. They are also brilliant, and they do one of the things that a lot of great scary stories do, which is they deal with some issues that we are concerned about now, like environmental issues and issues of addiction and loneliness, so those are also really wonderful stories that you should read when you get home.

And also you're going to find a poem by Malaika in there, and you're going to also see one of Emily and John's songs in there. So please do take that home. And when you get done reading your program, don't stick it in a drawer. It's got work by local artists in it. It's got work by local writers.

And one of the goals of tonight is to make sure that local writers in our area are getting some coverage, and they're getting people reading their works.

So when you're done, if you don't want to keep it as a keepsake, instead of sticking it in a drawer, pass it on to somebody else that you know who like scary stories. And that way they read it and say, when you get done, pass it on to someone else.

You're going to be able to find a digital copy of this program on Epic Dash Carteret Dot Com, and so you can share that with other people. And that'll be really, really easy to share.

I'm going to leave you with my favorite poem by Malaika, which is also included in the program.

"How to be Content"

Drink alone at night
and dream of a fierce wind
that sends seeds too far
away to gather.

Braid snakes into your hair,
throw a diamond ring in the river,
and watch how all things
are lost to water.

Thank you. Drive safely. Happy hauntings!