

# Slash & Burn

poems by LE Francis

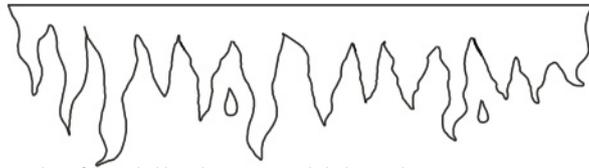


# Slash & Burn

Poems inspired by horror movies  
by LE Francis

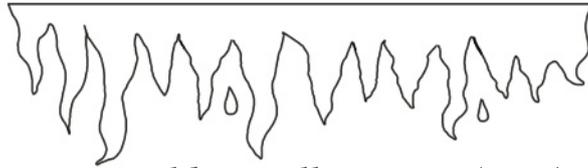
*For the Ghost in the Magazine Team. You didn't cause this but you certainly encouraged it.*

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Hell is just a tepid pool of mildly  
haunted blood so I guess it's up to me  
to roast this bitch



*Inspired by "Hellraiser II" (1988)*

Julia, you skinless slut, you know exactly  
how this is going to go, you'll suck his face  
& fill the lines around his mouth with mucous  
& blood & he'll open his neat-pressed slacks  
& every flaccid disappointment will pour out,  
smelling of old piss & moth balls. Are you  
so deprived of mortifying sex & deco bedposts  
in the lake of fire? How do you claw your way  
out of hell through a gore soaked mattress  
& simply settle for the first old bastard  
who stares at you like he's got a new tube  
of polident & he's willing to take a risk  
on an overripe candy apple? You'll push  
aside his disused NordicTrack & peel back  
inches of humanity to rebuild your life, never able  
to retrieve any fragment of the love you lost,  
& all under the yellow-rimmed eye of yet another  
tweed-jacket nerd who dead-ass decorates  
his office with a portrait of Crowley? There are  
greater things in heaven & earth & you sensed  
that once & you needed more than a conversation  
about stock options & spending all day thinking  
about the vibrator hidden in your sock drawer  
& yet your bold moves seem to take you right back  
to where you started - the professor's flapping gums,  
depilling sweaters & starching collars in cheap heels  
while fantasizing about a brother or cousin or anyone  
who could actually get you there - somewhere else  
connected to the universe that keeps shrugging  
you into oblivion because, bitch, you never learn.

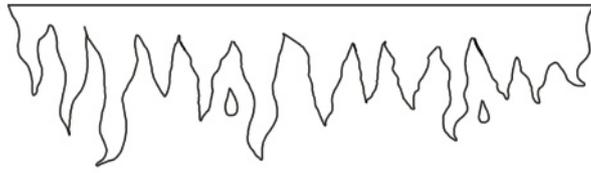
"I don't belong in the world"



*Inspired by "Carnival of Souls" (1962)*

Birdsong breaks through & you say  
I am simply unwell as I fade into your arms,  
you say I need to heal as I dig my fingers  
into the rind of the moment & pull back,  
if I could feel some summer sweet fruit  
bleeding raw under my fingernails would it be  
more real? Doctor, I am not ready to die,  
to be dead. You say I could be well, you say  
imagination is a place, a ballroom,  
& I disappear, my imagination dances  
with salty ankles across the broad empty  
of the promenade. You say this is normal,  
you say that I am a delicate thing, you say that I am  
cold & you're not wrong, I have gone under. I am  
clinging to a world in black & white, organ-lunged  
& asleep; I am clinging to a world  
where everyone I loved once existed,  
I walked to church services & dance halls,  
& home was a brief moment & it passed  
& now I have nowhere left to go  
no matter how much I wish to leave.

# Yo mama's a slut, your lordship



*Inspired by "And the Screaming Starts" (1973)*

Will anyone address the horny elephant  
in the room? Phantom hands caress living  
bodies & too late you realize that legacy is  
the thing that puts the gleam in your goblet.  
So much excess for the sake of sinking,

bloodlines like creek beds, dried up  
& choking on the exposed roots  
of the land. Ain't nobody rattling sabers,  
knotting cravats, telling ghost stories  
like those old bastards told. Bones already

gone to dust in the sleeves of their suits.  
They talk at you until your mind becomes  
an endless expanse of empty galleries,  
until it echoes with the nothing sound  
of all their ugly names – too many generations,

six hundred pages, three hundred years,  
& not a scientific fact was uttered. Superstitious  
men drank wine & their dove-necked wives  
fiddled with their embroidery, & they all went  
to bed in drafty rooms in anticipation of being

hung over. Oh, to be one of those fine types  
slick with green arsenic, wrestling skeletons  
from their graves. They could never be bothered  
in the event that a son's son should bear the mark  
of their shame. The woodsman's woe, the old man's  
nut, it's legends like this which drive the ladies insane.

"My uncle's an undertaker  
& he'll do it for you wholesale"



*Inspired by "Dr. Terror's House of Horrors" (1965)*

My darling you look so lovely, you move like a star  
that fell out of Orion's throat & tumbled to knock  
against the temple of the moon & we're all obsessed —  
the sky falls away, the sun nods his head, & all of earth

sways with you. Would it be yours — your breath, your music,  
the way you smile when someone sings along — your spell  
could build you a home & your trumpet could fill it with song.  
Instead you strayed, you stumbled, you pressed against the smoke,

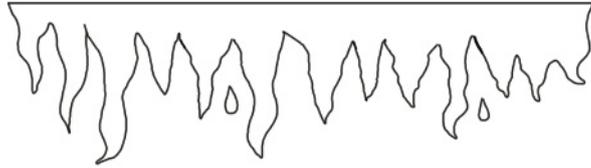
against the red walls of this precious club & it was lapped up  
by the wind that wanted to still your throat for housing a song  
you could never own. It was as if the heart of heaven had broken  
& you answered it with a swing and a glint, you son of a bitch.

You pulled the bowels of the earth out of her belly & took a bite & let it  
mellow on your tongue, let it spoil in your lungs, you let it poison you.  
You heard the faithful speak to god & decided worship was a commodity,  
you decided magic was a mirror & god wanted to glimpse his face in yours,

but the trick is in the revealing. & the card is always the thirteenth, see him  
with his hobbled back & the scythe that slashes the night sky open, see him  
pull infinity out of her throat & hand it to you so you can make & remake  
& remix but never mirror death's face back & call it god. It's a ghoulish beat,

a stolen dance, a shattered pane glued together with the audacity  
of a man who could have been so happy playing his own songs. Dig it darling,  
the crowd swells & screams & leaves you in the grave you dug with a horn  
& a half-hearted scheme. Death is a man in a suit & death waits for thee.

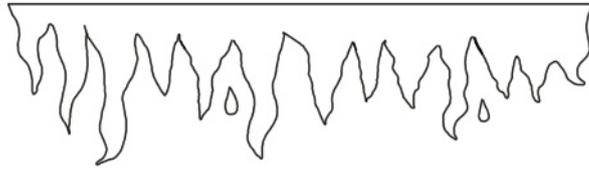
# "On your knees monk"



*Inspired by "Horror Express" (1972)*

Faith is stardust, faith is wooly-handed  
rage, faith is a breath of foreign air  
that rattles in the lungs of a stranger.  
It is appetite, heat, all symbol & language  
boiled pearly in a bloodless exhale. Faith is  
unreasonably easy to kill – a saber  
between the shoulders or temporal lobe  
contusion or a bullet lodged between  
the ribs. If only the priest would stop  
interfering. If only lovesick Rasputin  
could unswallow the morning star,  
his dangling dread slaps this heart  
against his thigh & he crumbles. Faith  
is change, faith is direction, faith is  
a calling back to all the love lost  
to restraint. Faith is blood-splatter,  
& twisted hands & eyes the color  
of a belly torn open, able to read  
the ancient universe like entrails,  
& as the new earth thrums outside  
his glare devours secrets & science & lies  
through satan's blood-rimmed eyes.

# "Alex, he's not roadkill"



*Inspired by "Mind Ripper" (1995)*

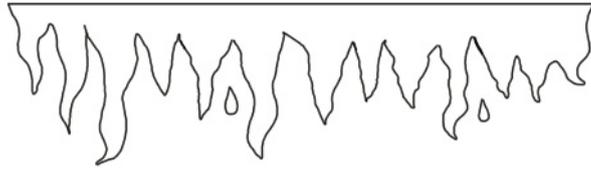
Say a prayer over me. How many futures are stolen  
from the spindle? A little string borrowed from the sleeping skein  
tucked into Lachesis' handbag – just a little more, sister. Splice  
in another day, another week, another life. Ask how our days  
define us? Those which are & aren't ours. A life's work

has never been a fair game & goddamn if monsters don't kill  
in a pair of snug jeans. It's motivation maybe – sex, money,  
dopamine, fame, food that isn't lousy with maggots. Moderation  
be damned, it's always the beautiful things that become our undoing.  
We work ourselves mad & repeat the silliest shit – a mind

is a terrible thing to waste & man is made in God's image.  
& God is ever sculpting, ever scheming, ever breathing life  
into the same tired stories even if we've missed the point.  
& God, what I wouldn't give for your thoughts to splash  
across my tongue, yellow & bitter, a synthesis of sound

& touch & feeling. The world as it belonged to you righting  
the wrongs as done to me, each private revelation knits  
another ripple in my bicep. Say a prayer over me & I will  
pull it from your skull, feel it fill the empty parts of me. I will  
tell God you were a good man & you made me in His image.

I just learned to fly this thing  
& we're low on fuel"



*Inspired by "Dawn of the Dead" (1978)*

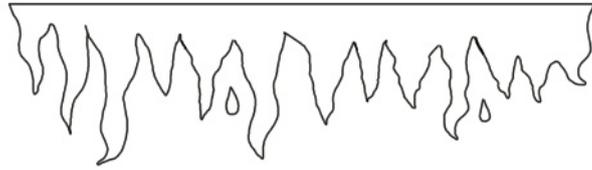
It's really over & in the end, what left us was our minds  
they lifted the soft anchors that kept us tethered to ourselves,  
to our lovers, to a new season of dresses that defined  
who we were for a day with an accuracy that compelled

a cough, a stutter, a language that spoke with a bite, it came  
with a chasm of ills, a system of escape routes, it came  
on the release of a patriotic whoop. Our hunger claimed  
us, defined us, never enough wars or steak dinners or blame

to fill all the soft parts of us that squelch between the teeth.  
Empty bellies wage war & famine raises the hardest hands  
& excess is a heavy head over the weakest shoulders that feeds  
on the brittle bones that raised it. What I mean is you can

feed them or you can let them starve & folks will do as they do –  
sense is a hard-sell pitch & brains are a commodity too.

# Not Mina says only death is cruel



*Inspired by "Nosferatu the Vampyre" (1979)*

Bright one – death has feet, four by four  
& coffins full of chittering rats. There are  
livestock shitting in these fetid streets,  
fat & slow & full of blood but only the sick  
would sink his teeth – dull, crooked,

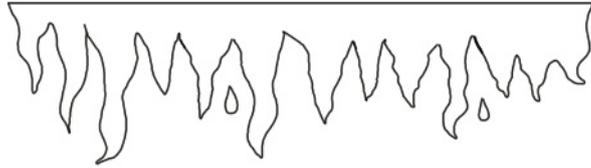
laughing all the way to Riga. Death  
has a shiny horn, death has green ribbons,  
& a hat that hangs crooked on his skull.  
It's a sad thing when the truth gets caught  
up in the Monster's fangs – it is existence

that is cruel: hungry, lonely, loveless,  
& persistent. It is knowing the edges  
of the universe as shapeless pieces  
that never fit into the larger puzzle.  
The terror in every story is its continuation,

it is a narrative of suffering called a life,  
mein gott our knowledge is our burden —  
each chapter, each fact, ever unquiet  
in our minds as we lose grip on our souls  
& blame the absence on the empty suit

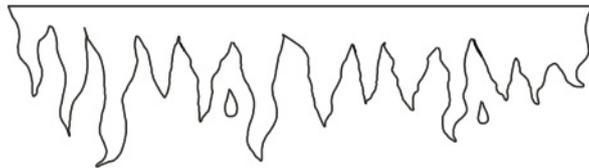
of death, leering behind black-rimmed eyes  
& a too-pale face. God may let us die  
but it is this world that sends us to the grave.

# Publication Acknowledgements



- “Hell is just a tepid pool of mildly haunted blood so I guess it’s up to me to roast this bitch” originally ran in The Bear Creek Gazette’s Halloween issue, October 2022.
- “My uncle’s an undertaker & he’ll do it for you wholesale” originally ran in Sage Cigarettes Magazine, October 2022.
- “I just learned to fly this thing & we’re low on fuel” originally ran in The Daily Drunk, October 2022.

## About the author



LE Francis is a recovering arts journalist writing poetry & fiction of varying length from the rainshadow of the Washington Cascades. Find her online at [nocturnical.com](http://nocturnical.com).