

## ATMOSPHERE AND MENACE



Pierre's monthly newsletter for the quirky, the nutty and noir

### September 2025 - Volume 1, Issue #03

In this newsletter: two macabre stories, the delightful website *The Marginalian*, and a performance of Bertha's World.

### The September Books Recommendation

The two September books are rich in atmosphere and menace, two hallmarks of this genre. *The Childish Thing* by John Metcalfe is a short story from *Nightmare Jack* and other tales. I hadn't heard of Metcalfe, but when I saw he writes in the mold of my favourite macabre story-telling authors I had to get a copy. This story really lived up to my expectations—as you may know, this is one of my favourite genres.

The protagonist is a young girl Dulcie who finds a doll / mannequin in the garden shed. It belonged to, it seems, the woman who worked for Dulcie's family and who recently passed away. As you imagine, the story around the doll and the maid's links to it are not straightforward and thus starts a very creepy tale. For those who like the macabre you will enjoy this and many of Metcalfe's other stories. It's dark, creepy and all the while you're not sure where it's headed. Metcalfe, it seems, is not that well known. I'm not a literature scholar so it was no surprise to me I hadn't heard of him, but a brief look at his history tells me he is not as celebrated as others in this genre, even though his writing is, I think, just as captivating. So, he really is part of the Bertha crowd: a less well-known gem!

As with many stories of this genre the creepiness and mysterious nature of the story is what attracts readers. The characters are usually well developed

and interesting, although that's not always the case and if I had a reservation about *The Childish Thing* I would say that is true here. The read is a short story and so character development is sometimes a limitation, but I mention it because it was something that stuck out for me. It didn't detract from my enjoyment, but I was dying to know more about the characters. There is one line that I found quite terrifying. The narrator explains how Dulcie tortures the doll, although, he adds, "not more than most girls of that age do". Oh my, that is a scary reminder of what children can be like, of human nature before we are fully socialised. It's unsettling.

*Seaton's Aunt* by Walter de la Mare ... now this really was just my kind of thing. It's dark, brooding, and the inspiration for the title of this newsletter:

**Atmosphere and Menace.** And you never quite know what's real or imagined. It's about Arthur Seaton, an orphan looked after by his aunt. I liked him straight away. He's peculiar, but not in a dangerous way. He is troubled and isolated by the haughty Englishness (he is said to be "unEnglish" in complexion, such a crafty description!) of his school. Arthur manages to make friends with the narrator who visits him and his aunt twice at their home in the country. The place is haunting and his aunt, heavens above, I find her a terrifying woman. I didn't read *Great Expectations* and don't even know the story although I have an image of old Miss Havisham in my head (maybe I saw her briefly in the movie trailer) and immediately thought of her. The narrator though thinks everything Arthur says about her is exaggerated and he dismisses his stories about ghosts in the house. And without spoiling the story, you never quite know what's real. Is Arthur mad? Is he just in tune to what is really happening?

Those who don't like these sorts of macabre creepy stories often comment that nothing much happens in this kind of genre. That's sometimes true and is certainly true for *The Childish Thing*. But for me, nothing major needs to happen. It's all about the characters, real or imagined, the atmosphere and the ever-present menace. And if that's what you like, you will love these two stories.

## The Marginalian

A friend of mine referred me to [The Marginalian](#), which posts a collection of articles and stories online (you can sign up for a weekly newsletter). I find this online collection and new posts an absolute treat, even if they neither nutty nor noir! The full title is *The Marginalian: the marginalia in our search for meaning*, and it lives up to that aspiration. It features non-fiction articles, short stories, poems, commentaries and reviews and references to books and films. They are engaging, very well written and very informative. I was particularly drawn to an article *In Defence of Joy*, which is truly profound. In this world where we are pounded by never-ending disastrous news, it is difficult to find a sense of joy. This article is very convincing as to why that so important to find and how it is uniquely linked to consciousness. Thank you, Maria Popova, kind creator of *The Marginalian*. You have created something very beautiful. I have a memoir planned for next year and have her permission to use a quote from the article on joy to use as a leader.

## Bertha's World

I was planning to debut the one-man performative story telling show of *Bertha's World* at the Garden Route Arts Festival in Wilderness, October 9-12. Unfortunately I have had to cancel my participation due to other events, but [here is a link](#) for readers who may find themselves in the area. All live events are free. My *Bertha's World* story telling show will probably have to wait for the Edinburgh Festival in 2026. I have had fun developing this performance that tells the story of Bertha through the eyes of Inspector Fransie Fransen from African Interpol who is hot on her trail as she travels across Africa.



## Coming In October

Meet Sue Robertson Danells. She started her writing journey at the age of 71. I will cover some of the issues that independent authors face. And hear about a forthcoming French translation of my some of my work.

Be free to be, Bertha and me.

Pierre

Pierre



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