JOHN S. BRINKERHOFF

The Sin-Eaters

long shapes hover beside the creek, seeing the shimmer of bitter fires on the water—

they shovel flaming ground, hearing whispered tales of mangled limbs and morning wars—

they cup cold, weed-lipped railroad tracks, feeling the shiver and blast of greasy cannons—

they breathe sweet wind on stone-marked hills, smelling the corpses of sunburned soldiers and bloated horses—

they tongue names: Gettysburg, Chattanooga, Atlanta, tasting bloody leaves and the sly horror of sharp smoke—

mouth smiles accuse; stony eyes buried in brim-shade are gorged, gorged, and hungering for more.

Kenilworth it stands firm upon its hill

incomplete.

sky glazes
the great arched windows.
stepworn stairs
fall short of rooms.
the gates are frozen shut.
its ragged walls belong
to doves, and trailing vines.

upon its hill, it stands firm,

solitary,
seeming to need no more
than birds and vines
to shoulder the seasons
once again turning,
surviving the shadows best
when before its autistic stare
the night
comes to kneel

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