
Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Lena Sarbanes Ehrlich: “Scary Story”

Lena Sarbanes Ehrlich · Saturday, October 31st, 2020

This story is inspired by Mary Shelley, who you may know as the author of Frankenstein. After her husband Percy died from drowning at age 29, his heart couldn't be cremated, likely from his having tuberculosis earlier in life. Mary took to carrying it around with her in a silk bag. Creepy huh? Well, read the story!!

*

A new family is moving into the house next door. Well, I don't think you could really call it that. A fourteen-year-old girl, a catatonic mother, an old and creaky gardener, and a quiet housemaid. Who even has maids anymore? They don't seem like the kind of people who would move to a sleepy beachside town like Shellshore, nor to the house next door. The house next door is a mansion, and could be described the same way as the gardener. Old and creaky. It looks like something out of a Tim Burton movie, with its four stories, leaning roofs, and dull dark gray outside. I don't know why they need a gardener, though. The front yard is barely five square feet, and it hasn't been watered or tended to in years. The dirt is probably rock-hard by now.

The “family” has been living there for about two days now. I wonder if the girl is going to come to public school. She seems... eccentric. I've only seen her twice, once when the movers were bringing in a large, old-fashioned steamer trunk and a glass case covered with a stained red velvet cloth. She seemed to be directing them somewhere. The other time was when she came out with a wooden box, soil, seed packets, and a watering can. After she had filled her little box with soil, she shook some seeds into her hand. They were bright red and-squishy? I blinked, but she had already planted them. Finally, she watered them with some extremely dirty-looking water. She had long red hair, set in two braids tied with neon elastics. The few times I've seen her, she has been wearing girly pink dresses with flower or bunny patterns. They're usually very faded, and ALWAYS have some suspicious-looking stains on them. For some reason, she has a silk bag dangling from her waistband. It too has stains.

Today, my mom baked lasagna to give to the new neighbors. We brought them over at a seemingly bad time, because when we rang the doorbell, we heard frantic shouting from inside. “Clean it up, someone's at the door!” “Keep your hair on! I'm doing it!” Finally, someone opened the door. It was the girl. “Sorry about that! We spilled some punch. I'm Crimson! Who are you?” Always cheerful, my mom smiled widely, saying “Hi Crimson! Nice to meet you! We just wanted to welcome you to the neighborhood with some lasagna! I'm Shirley, and this is Leo! We live right next door. I hope you'll come over sometime soon!” Crimson grimaced, then quickly shifted to a

wide grin matching my mother's. "That is SO nice of you, Shirley! I'm really excited to get to know you!" she bubbled. After a lot of giggling and chattering on Mom and Crimson's part, we finally left. Looking back at the house, I thought I saw someone throw Mom's lasagna out the window.

A few days after that strange encounter, Crimson enrolled at the same middle school I go to. It's October, which is a really crazy time at Shellshore Middle. Everyone is obsessed with Halloween. In English, we read ghost stories. In science, we dissect bats. In gym, we do Halloween workout videos. Not to mention all of the events! The Halloween Dance, Ghost Story Night, Pumpkin Carving Potluck, Harvest Festival, etc. Crimson seems to be fine with it. I've even heard her telling spooky urban legends to the sixth graders. When our homeroom teacher, Mr Galibatsi, introduced her in class, there was somewhat of an uproar. In all seriousness, I don't think there's ever been a new student here, so you can imagine the reaction. Crimson went from being the "new girl" to the most popular girl in school almost overnight. There's always at least fifteen people sitting at her lunch table and bombarding her with questions. Most of the teachers love her too. She knows all the creepy classics in English, and fascinates our science teacher with an uncanny knowledge of the human body, as well as most rodents.

Even though she could be friends with basically whoever she wants, Crimson seems to like hanging around me. Me. The shy nerd with no friends. Everyone asks her why, but she just answers, "He has useful parts." She comes to my house every day after school, which delights my mother. They have a great time gossiping about everything from Kelly's manicure to Mr Galibatsi's unfortunate skin condition. I don't really mind though. Once they're done, me and Crimson like to catch bugs in the garden, or read poetry. She likes all the same poets as me, and knows every bug or plant's scientific name. Also, she collects jam jars. Whenever my mom finishes a jam, she gives the jar immediately to Crimson. I'm not really sure what she does with them, though. Crimson's one of the nicest and smartest people I've ever met, but she just won't tell me what's in her little silk pouch. I try and try to find out, but she denies me every time.

Even though we hang out every day, she always has to be home by 5:00. Crimson says she has to, because her mother's needs insist. I don't know how someone in a coma could be so needy! I don't know why she's in a coma, either. Now I think about it, Crimson's very secretive. She's never invited me over, and she won't tell me what's in her pouch, what she uses jam jars for, why her mom's in a coma, where she's from, what she planted in her garden, or even her last name! She's a mystery wrapped in a bubbly exterior.

It's been almost two and a half weeks since Crimson moved here. I still haven't met the gardener or the maid, nor has she invited me over. Halloween is in three days. I'm going as a vampire, and Crimson is apparently going to be a bunny? I'm not sure why she would want to do that, but it would make sense considering the fact that she wears a lot of bunny-pattern dresses. It's getting very strange to be their neighbor. They seem to be throwing away a lot of food, because their dumpster is full of uneaten salads, lasagnas, steaks, and other foods. We frequently hear strange noises coming from their house. Squelching, splattering, screaming, knives sharpening, etc. When I asked, Crimson said it was their Halloween sound machine. I'm not so sure, but what other explanation could there be? It wasn't like Crimson and the maid were murdering people every night!

It's Halloween night, and I'm supposed to go over to Crimson's house to watch horror movies. She got invited to approximately 25 parties but refused them all. I'm still confused as to why she

prefers me over society, but at least I have a friend. Crimson meets me at the door with a bowl of candy. She must be really hot, she's wearing a huge furry bunny suit. Crimson leads me through her house. There's barely any furniture, except a worn, gray couch and an end table here and there. All of the curtains are drawn, and the walls are painted black. It's very austere. Here and there, I see jam jars with random things pickling in brine; cacti, mugs, even books! Is this what she uses them for? We walk for a while, until we get to the stairs to the basement. Crimson asks me, "Do you promise not to tell anyone what you see down here?" This, as you might think, makes my mind dream up a million disturbing possibilities, but I say, "Okay." She starts down the stairs, removing her bunny costume as she goes. Underneath, she has on a faded lavender dress with a pattern of strawberries. A lab coat hangs from a peg on the wall. Crimson puts it on, and removes something from the pocket. It's a silver knife.

"Crimson? Wha-what's going on?" I sputter. She doesn't answer, but snaps her fingers. The maid comes shuffling down the stairs. She's wearing the kind of costume old-fashioned waitresses used to wear. Her apron is splattered with... wine? It can't be blood. In any case, the maid grabs my shoulders and veers me towards the center of the room. There's a blood-splattered hospital gurney off to one side. The maid drags it into the center of the room.

"Sit."

I obey. Crimson, meanwhile, has been snapping on a pair of Latex gloves and goggles. "Well, Leo. I guess this is what it has come to." she says.

"What do you mean?"

"Might as well tell you, since you're going to die anyway.

"You see, my mother, Bela, has a life threatening illness to which there is no cure. But before she went into her coma, she told me a way to resurrect her. I must assemble her a body using other people's organs, then insert her brain and heart. And that is what I came here to do. My steamer trunk holds my collection of pickled body parts, and the glass case is where I keep the finest of them. I keep my mother's brain and heart in the little silk pouch you're always asking about." She gestures to the steamer trunk and glass case in the corner. "But I realised, why not just do it for Mother? I could use an assistant! That is where Ellen came from. Mr What's-his-name, the gardener, was just someone I took on to use for body parts, but he was too old for them to be any use. So we had to dispose of him." The maid grins and holds up a severed hand. "But when I met you, I realized that you would be the perfect donor for Mother's lungs! So I befriended you and your mother, all the while collecting more components for Mother's new body. And now that you're here, I can get my mother back again!"

Ellen ties me to the gurney, giggling maniacally. Crimson sharpens a scalpel, and other equally sharp tools. She advances. "I'm sorry, Leo. But I have to do this." She whispers into my ear, then slides the scalpel into my chest.

EPILOGUE

The sun is out, and Bela is awake. Crimson has saved her from certain death, and they are happy. They are together, and that is enough. But one thought lurks at the back of Crimson's mind. What about all the people she killed? What about Leo?

THE END

This entry was posted on Saturday, October 31st, 2020 at 1:25 pm and is filed under [Fiction](#). You can follow any responses to this entry through the [Comments \(RSS\)](#) feed. You can skip to the end and leave a response. Pinging is currently not allowed.