

## The Psychologist

The patient, who had been tilting her head up to look at me from beneath her wet hair, moved with sudden speed, pulling herself from Nurse Heather's grasp. She grabbed my arm and yanked us both to our knees. I found myself gazing into a single golden-brown eye, bright as it gave me a gimlet stare. The rest of her face was obscured by her hair.

Before I could pull myself from her, she shook her head, violent and distressed. "You must help her. You're the only one who can."

Startled and stunned, I froze where the patient held me. "Help who?" It was the only thing I could think to say. I tried to get a better look at the woman's face, but she shook her head again, hair still hiding her face. One bright golden eye—lucid despite the drugs in her system—stared back at me.

"It's within her. It was too much for me. Too many things to care for. I couldn't...She needed it...I didn't know what she'd do... the protection failed. You have to help her."

I put my hand on hers, keeping my voice calm. "I do not understand. Whom do I need to help?"

The grip on my arm tightened even as the lucidity in that single eye dimmed and dulled. "Don't make me rip the scales from your eyes. Don't make me. It'll change you forever. It'll change me, too. Please, don't make me do it!"

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Novella

# To Fight the Black Wind

by Jennifer Brozek



Fantasy Flight Games

## Welcome to Arkham

**I**T IS THE HEIGHT OF THE ROARING TWENTIES. Flappers and young fellas dance the Charleston at raucous jazz clubs gleaming bright with electric lights. Beneath this gilded glamour, bloody turf wars rage, funded by gangsters and crooked cops who frequent rival speakeasies and gambling dens.

Amid these changing times, old New England towns hold their secrets close. Off the Aylesbury pike, in reclusive Dunwich, rolling hills hide decrepit farms and witch-haunted hollows. Past Cape Ann, the remote fishing village of Insmouth rots from within. At the mouth of the Miskatonic River, mist-shrouded Kingsport lies dreaming. All the while, historic Arkham broods on the upper banks of the Miskatonic, its famed university delving into the world's darkest, most ancient mysteries.

Arkham's citizens insist everything is normal in their sleepy town, but horrific and bizarre events occur with increasing frequency. Strange lights flicker and people disappear in the forest beyond Hangman's Brook. Misshapen silhouettes prowl graveyards and shorelines, leaving savaged corpses in their wake. Nightmarish artifacts and disturbing tomes have surfaced, chronicling gods and incantations the world has tried to forget. Cavalier scientists have glimpsed far-flung worlds beyond our own that shatter the known laws of reality. Are these events somehow connected? If so, what calamity do they portend?

Those who dare investigate these incidents witness the inexplicable. Having seen such phenomena, they can never regain their old view of the world. Now that they know the hideous truth, they cannot run or hide from it. Just beneath the reassuring veneer of reality—a veneer that was never meant to be worn away—are forces that can drive the average person to despair. Yet, a rare few try to avert the end of the world, knowing it may well cost them their lives or sanity.

These investigators must rely on their wits and skills to learn as much as they can before it's too late. Some may find courage in the grace of a rosary, while others may burn away their fears with a swig of bootleg whiskey. They must try their hand at unpredictable spells that could doom them, or take up rifles and revolvers to combat foul creatures plaguing the night. Will it be enough?

# Chapter 1

*There are events and people that change your life forevermore. It is rare, though, that we acknowledge these occurrences. My perspective, my worldview, my life has been so altered I feel I must record what happened. I will always remember this week as a turning point. I will always remember Josephine as the catalyst for that change.*

*It began as all such things begin—on an ordinary day. I had seen all of my regular patients. Then I met my newest patient, Miss Josephine Ruggles. Our first meeting was a study in power dynamics between patients and doctors.*

*Josephine, heiress to the Ruggles Publishing fortune, sat on the edge of an overstuffed chair, her back straight and chin raised. She had not yet become one of the anonymous unfortunates of the asylum, shuffling to and fro with slumped shoulders and vacant eyes. She still wore a fine linen dress of pale yellow that enhanced her warm, tawny-beige skin. Her ebon hair still held organized curls gathered in a bow. A small gold cross adorned her neck.*

*At first glance, Josephine was a lovely young woman of good manners and quality breeding. That is, if you ignored the pale blue dressing gown she wore over her linen dress. Ignored the darkness under hollow brown eyes and did not see the slight tremble to hands*

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that clutched at the heavy silken fabric of a robe not usually worn out of the bedroom.

*Her malady—nightmares that left her bloody—seemed, at first, to be a common self-harm complex. Then I looked at the wounds. The mind is powerful, but I have never seen the mind create wounds like these.*

*Little did I know her wounds were just the first of many mysteries I would face while caring for Josephine.*

“You do not believe me, Dr. Fern.” Josephine’s voice was a smooth contralto, roughened by fatigue.

It was a challenge designed to bring about a black and white reaction—disbelief brought distrust while belief allowed the patient to manipulate the doctor. I did neither. “We have yet to begin our first session, Miss Ruggles.” As Josephine pondered this, I noted which drugs my new patient was taking. All were designed to give blissful, dreamless sleep.

Josephine gestured to the notes in my hands. “You began when you read those, *Doctor*. You do not believe me.”

What would I not believe? My patient had nightmares, despite the medication she took to prevent such things, and she harmed herself at night. Something in the way she said “Doctor” made me wonder what kind of encounters she had had with Dr. Mintz. Perhaps that was where her aggressive stance stemmed from.

There was nothing specific in her records. Then again, many of his more esoteric experiments were never written about in public files. I kept the distaste from my face as I took a seat in the chair next to Josephine’s. “I am listening. Please, tell me what you think I do not believe.”

Josephine sighed. “The wounds—the *words* on my back. You do not believe they were caused by things in my dreams. Even when they are in places I cannot reach. Even when they are fresh and lined as if made by a printing press.”

None of what Josephine was suggesting was possible, of course. However, in the beginning, I always allow my patients a way out of their fantasies. A way to prove or disprove their statements. “I have not seen your wounds. I cannot judge them.”

Josephine stood as if jerked by marionette strings. She turned

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her back to me and opened her robe. With the almost soundless crumpling of fabric to the floor, the reason for the robe became clear: The back of the linen dress was stained red-brown. The rows of weeping wounds pressed their image into the cloth. It was even and regular. While it was unusual for patients to be so careful with their self-inflicted wounds, it was possible.

“Malachi. He told me once that you might understand. That you had tried to help him.”

I twitched from my examination of Josephine’s back and the hieroglyphic bloodstains in linen.

“Malachi?” How could she possibly know the name of my murdered patient from Providence Sanatorium? There was no earthly way she could know of him, an itinerant man in another part of the state.

“Yes, Malachi. I used to see him in my dreams. He is gone now. I have not seen him in a long time.” The beautiful woman turned in one controlled, smooth motion—another testament to her inner strength and spirit, yet unbroken by the asylum. “Do you understand? Do you believe me?”

I did not. She spoke to Malachi in her dreams? How was that possible? It was not, of course. Josephine could not be speaking of my murdered patient. That would be ludicrous. She had to be speaking of another Malachi. After all, she was speaking of conversations in dreams.

I covered my confusion by taking Josephine’s robe and standing. I offered it to her with a gentle smile that hid the turmoil within. “Perhaps we should begin at the beginning. Pretend I know nothing. We will go from there.”

Josephine stared at me for a long, timeless moment before she accepted her robe and slid it on. She nodded once. “The beginning then. Such as it is.”

The pounding of my heart was loud in my ears as I took my seat once more. I tried to put the very idea of Malachi out of my mind. My patient was before me. She needed my help. If I listened close enough, I would understand her true trauma. I focused the whole of my being upon her.

Five heartbeats later, Josephine joined me, once more the unruffled young woman of high society. Despite her calm demeanor, the

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mask of her control was cracking: the unconscious flicks of her eyes about my office lingered on the windows and door as if seeking escape. If I did not work quickly, I would lose her to the asylum.

“The beginning. Three weeks ago, I woke up screaming. Even as my maid rushed into my chambers, the nightmare faded. All I remember now is a spiral of symbols and a labyrinth of woods.” Josephine paused, glancing at me.

I nodded encouragement, my pen and my voice silent. It was standard fare so far. Images of being lost or out of control. I wondered what had happened three weeks ago to bring this about. I would have to find out what changed in her life.

“In truth, I do not remember these things. I wrote them in my dream journal. I have always been a vivid dreamer. Almost everyone in my family is. My brother, Leland, he dreamed even more than I do. Such lovely dreams.” Sadness marred her face for a second, then disappeared back into that studied face of cultured politeness. “Even on the medication, I still dream, but I do not, cannot, remember what I dream of.” Her dark eyes flittered over my face, seeking something. “I cannot tell you why the symbols or labyrinth frightened me. I regained my composure and continued my day.” Her hand, with its neatly trimmed fingernails, petted the smooth fabric of her dressing gown.

Again, I said nothing, but gestured for her to continue. Silence was ever my ally. It did appear that Josephine had a rich fantasy life. Not too unusual in the grand scheme of things. The fact that her family seemed to encourage the fantasy in both of their children *was* unusual. They had clearly spoken of their dreams to each other.

Josephine’s eyes glazed as she looked into the past. “I thought it was a singular folly. Instead, I woke up screaming the next morning, and the next and the next, for a full week. I did not remember these dreams upon waking. I forced myself to forget them. I did not want to remember.” She paused. “Part of me did. But I was too afraid to uncover what made me scream my throat raw each night.

“Two weeks ago, the wounds began to appear on my back. First one symbol—a word, perhaps. Then what I presume was a sentence, to now what you just saw: the paragraph carved into my flesh. I chose to come here for help. I chose you to help me after I discovered you worked here.”



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“How did you discover this?” I noted Josephine had begun to weave me into her narrative. She assumed I believed the wounds to be writing. Alternatively, she was not willing to accept that I did not believe the wounds to be writing.

“Dr. Mintz mentioned you in passing to Nurse Heather. I remembered your name from Malachi.” Josephine gave me a sly smile. “As I am here voluntarily, I still have a say in who treats me. I suspect the good doctor is unhappy with this turn of events.”

Again, I suppressed my distaste at the “good” doctor’s experiments. “I would not doubt it. Do you mind, though, if I talk to him about his findings?” I wondered if Josephine had mentioned Malachi—*her* Malachi, not mine—to Dr. Mintz. It was a name he would know.

No. It was a coincidence. Nothing more. The name, while not popular, was not unusual. She was not referring to my lost patient.

Josephine shook her head. “No, I do not mind. But I will not be subject to his experiments. I have seen the results in some of his patients as the poor creatures pass by my room.”

“Of course.” I considered my words carefully. I did not want to agree or disagree with her. Nor did I want to slam any doors. Trust was still being established. I needed to make certain I understood what she was telling me. A clinical summary would be the baseline for future discussions. “As I understand it, for three weeks you have had nightmares, but no memory of what they are about. Is that correct?”

Josephine took a moment to consider my words before she nodded her agreement.

“Two weeks ago, the wounds began to appear. Were they always on your back?”

“No. The first one was on my side.” She touched her left hip. “It was a single mark. After that, they moved to my back.”

“Do they heal?” I wanted to write out notes, but writing anything down would throw a barrier between us. I would go from confidant to doctor with a single stroke of the pen. Trust, once broken, is difficult to re-establish. I had to rely upon my memory for now.

“Some. Though, they are renewed each night. I fear I will ever carry their scars.”

“Has anything new appeared in the last couple of days?” If they

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had, it would mean her illness was still progressing. If not, it had stabilized...perhaps with the knowledge I would be her new doctor.

Josephine shook her head. “Not that I know of. But my back is so filled with the writing, I would not be able to tell if there were something new. The pain is the same: a single, widespread ache over my entire back, heightened into sharp clarity when fabric is pulled from it.”

I held my chin for a moment, considering. As a doctor of the mind, I did not physically examine my patients unless it was absolutely necessary. In this case, I believed it was. I had to see the wounds themselves to mark them and determine their healing progress. It would also give me a better sense of what could have caused them to appear in the first place.

Decided, I stood. “Miss Ruggles, I need to see your wounds. I also need to make a written copy and an impression of them. Will you allow this?”

“What will you do with them?”

“I will not know until I have seen them. It matters how the wounds were made. Looking at them will tell me.” I left the door open for Josephine’s remarks about her wounds to be true. I also allowed her the dignity to deny me and to protect her fabrications.

While I did not state I thought they were self-inflicted, I watched as disappointment, fear, determination, and acceptance crossed Josephine’s face, one after the other. She had decided that I did not believe her, but she felt my examination would vindicate her belief that her dreams caused the marks—that she had not created them herself.

I, on the other hand, expected to see what I have always seen—the torn skin of self-inflicted wounds made by fingernails. It did not matter how neat they were.

Josephine inclined her head. “I will allow this. My maid is waiting outside your office.”

Hanna, Josephine’s maid, was a lady’s maid in every sense. She wore a black dress of good quality and a white apron. Her sepia skin was clear and clean. Her hair—black with grey shot through it—was pulled back into a neat bun. Smile lines graced her face and she did not have the calluses of a maid of all work. Instead, Josephine appeared to be her singular priority.

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The two women were comfortable with each other and their respective roles to the point of a heightened, silent language. They understood each other on a level few reached. Hanna would go to the ends of the earth for her mistress, no doubt. Perhaps I could arrange a meeting between the two of us to see if there was something the servant could tell me that the patient could not.

I locked the office door as Hanna helped Josephine with her dress. It was rare for anyone to interrupt me during a session, but it did happen. I wanted no mistakes.

A hiss behind me caught my attention. Turning, I saw Hanna peel the linen cloth from Josephine's back. The maid reached for a soft cloth from the basket she had carried in with her—another foresight of the young Miss Ruggles no doubt. I raised a hand and my voice. "Wait. Please. Allow me to look first."

Hanna glanced at Josephine who nodded her permission. "Pardon, ma'am. I usually bind her wounds each morning. Except for this morning."

At first glance, Josephine's back was a bloody mess, then the marks became clear. I peered close, focusing in on one of the wounds. Her skin puckered outward, as if the mark had been pushed *out* of her rather than scratched *into* her. As I stared, the wound became a glyph before my eyes. Then the rows of marks became sentences. It *was* writing. I felt myself drawn into them. It was familiar and alien at the same time.

"Well?" Josephine asked.

I shook off the train of thought I had followed and focused back to my task. How could I have thought it was writing? They were nothing more than rows of wounds—not glyphs. I needed to determine how the wounds were made. "One moment, please."

When one scratched at a wound over and over, it left a divot. I had patients who had picked their scabs bloody. The edges of those wounds also stood up. However, the edges always morphed with the healing process and the damage caused by the tearing of scab from skin.

These edges were straight and unmarred. I touched a fingertip to Josephine's back, running it over one of the marks. Drying blood rasped against my fingertip, but the flesh beneath was soft. It felt as if this was the first time the wound had been made, even though

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the lacerations had been there for more than a week. This was not the repeated ripping of skin. This should not be possible.

“If you would, Hanna, clean each wound one at a time. I will copy it down. Then go on to the next one.”

“Yes, Doctor.”

“Miss Ruggles—”

“Call me Josephine. We are... *intimates*... now. Are we not?”

Though the young woman did not turn around, I sensed her smiling at me, or at a private joke. “As you wish. Josephine, do the wounds continue to weep throughout the day?” I wondered if she noticed I did not invite the same familiarity of having her call me Carolyn. Whether or not she believed we were friends, we were not. There were boundaries we needed to keep as patient and doctor.

“Sometimes. The more difficult the day, the more the wounds react.”

“Thank you.” I nodded to Hanna. “Begin, please.”

We stood like that, the heiress, her maid, and myself: a tableau of concern. Josephine held her dress to her, preserving her modesty. Hanna cleaned each wound one by one and allowed me the time to copy it down exactly before going on to the next one. A heavy silence filled the air—not awkward, just anticipatory.

As Hanna finished cleaning the blood from the last of the marks, more than half of them had begun to glisten and weep. I pulled one of my clean handkerchiefs from a desk drawer and unfolded it. “We will press this to Josephine’s back in a single motion,” I instructed the maid, “then pull it away as soon as all of the marks show themselves.” It would not take long for the fine white cloth to capture the wounds as a whole.

Together, we covered Josephine’s back. I pressed a careful hand to the fabric. The glyphs—the wounds—bled through immediately. With a nod, we pulled the handkerchief away, carrying with it a perfect replica of the writing that appeared to force its way out of Josephine’s skin.

Something in the way the blood soaked into the cloth pressed another image into my mind: blood forced through the skin in myriad religious paintings. As Hanna bound her mistress’s wounds and helped her dress again, one idea crowded my mind: *stigmata*.

Whatever trauma afflicted Josephine’s mind, it was possible,

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logical even, that her only means of expressing that trauma was the manifestation of stigmata-like symptoms. I smiled, relieved. Somehow, I had a possible answer.

But I would need to consult with the “good” Dr. Mintz first.