

# GOTHIC NATURE



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## GOTHIC NATURE II

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***Model IV***, 2017

Artist: D Rosen

Cast Aluminum (Original Objects: Buck Antler and Stomach (Decorative Model), Camel Mask

(Theatrical Model), Whip (Didactic Model), Stiletto (Decoy Model), Goose Neck (Decoy Model),

Nylons, Bra Underwire, Calvin Klein Dress, Facial Mask, Necklace, Wax  
21 x 25 x 12 in.

Photo credit: Jordan K. Fuller

Fabrication: Chicago Crucible

**WEB DESIGNER:**

Michael Belcher

## Half-Angry

*Geralyn Pinto*

In the half-angry light of a tropical forest at sundown it was hard to distinguish tortured creepers from snakes or a man-shape from a man. Besides, Richard McMaster wasn't really alive to his surroundings. He only knew that he was climbing a mountain road, far away from anywhere and that Jack Ellis shouldn't have done what he had.

Ever since the Mutiny, seventy-five years before, offending native sentiment was strictly prohibited in any form or practice. But there would *always* be the Jack Ellises of the British Raj. It was he who had decided that they must go hunting, and that it *had to be* in the kan, the sacred groves of the Shimoga Hills. 'Shimoga': face of Lord Shiva, the Destroyer; three-eyed Hindu God of the trident and the tiger skin. Then Richard McMaster went down with a fever and Jack Ellis proceeded on his own. When he didn't turn up at the Government office on the following Monday, Richard was faintly puzzled; when Jack's orderly presented himself at the McMaster bungalow to say that his ayya had vanished without a trace, Richard was downright worried.

That's why he was climbing the Ghats, the mountains of the west coast of India, alone in a battered, old sedan, taking the route that Jack must have on his way through the hallowed forests.

That's also why he didn't notice the man at first, half-concealed by bush and tree, waving down his car. Richard almost drove on—the man was a local probably wanting a lift to the nearest mountain village. It would be pointless, even inadvisable, to confide in the native that he was searching for a colleague, Jack Ellis, who stubbed out cigars on the statues of Gods and Goddesses, and hunted animals in the kan.

But it went against his old Public School code of chivalry to ignore someone obviously in need. So he halted his car and reversed. The man climbed in, raising a hand to his forehead in greeting. It was hard to tell what he looked like in the resentful light of dusk. But it was safe to say that he

was one of the thickset, muscular kinds of mountain folk you saw on official tours and that he wore a little more than a yellowing loincloth that concealed just enough of a body the colour of mud.

‘Where to?’ Richard summoned up as much as he could of his store of the local lingo.

‘Two miles down this road, ayya’. The man’s replies were adequate, no more.

‘Two miles? Where would that take you? Not to a Dak Bungalow, a Government Rest House, would it?’

The man shook his head, ‘There are no Dak Bungalows in these parts, ayya’. The light, such as it was, dappled the man’s skin through the car window: dark-light, dark-light.

Mosquitoes sensing the promise of a blood meal hurled themselves at the windscreen. Richard McMaster halted and rolled up the window glasses. In the distance, hyenas cackled in early moonlight. On the branch of a tree a vulture, neck sunk between bird shoulders, bided its time.

There must be carrion somewhere.

‘These *are* the kan, the woods sacred to the Hindus, aren’t they?’

‘Yes, that they are, ayya’.

‘And they say that the God Shiva himself, with a cobra coiled about his neck, strides these mountain copses?’

His companion said nothing.

Richard took him in with a side-wise glance. Surely those eyes were brighter and lighter than he had at first noticed? Most Indian eyes were the colour of burnt cinnamon. He became conscious of other things too—the strange tangle of odours—the fragrance of wild jasmine and kadamba flowers which stole in from the outside; and the sharp reek of the man next to him in the confined space of the car.

A lopsided road stone indicated another mile.

‘Thank you, ayya. I will get down here’.

‘*Here?*’ Richard was incredulous. ‘But there’s nothing for miles around...’

‘My duty is accomplished. I must return’.

The man alighted and salaamed his way into the shadows. Richard revved up the engine and resumed his journey.

Strange thoughts flitted through his mind: Wasn’t it Jim Corbett, the legendary hunter turned conservationist of north India who said, ‘A man-eating tiger does not break the laws of Nature, only the laws of Men’?

But wait now! Wait! What was that again? His eye fell upon a rusted signboard which announced ‘*Proceed with Caution. Salt Lick of the Panthera tigris two furlongs ahead*’.

His heart took a quick, cold leap downwards, ‘The man...I let him wander off by himself into tiger country! Was he mistaken about where he should alight? I must turn back! I must!!’

He turned back.

When Richard McMaster reached the spot between the rain-sodden dirt track and the jungle where he and the native had parted, he noticed nothing remarkable till the headlights of his sedan picked out the fresh impress of pug marks.

He had the slightest feeling that many eyes were watching him.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Geralyn Pinto** served as Associate Professor in the Post-Graduate Department of English at St Agnes College, Mangalore.

She won the *Desi Writers Lounge* Short Story Prizes (2013 & 2014); the First Prize in the *Save as Writers* International Creative Writing Contest, Canterbury (2016); and the Second Prize in the US-based 'Writer Advice Flash Fiction Contest 2020'. Among her other literary achievements were the publication of her story 'Seven Steps from Irula Country' in the American journal *Tahoma Literary Review*.

Her poems have been featured in the journals of the Universities of Leeds and London and Mahidol University, Thailand. Another poem, 'From August to September' appeared in *The Tiger Moth Review*, Singapore, while 'The Nowhere People' has been included in an anthology of lockdown poetry published by *Poetry Space*, Dorset, England.

Geralyn is an overseas member of *Alibi*, a British online writers group.