

The LAND *of* BAD DREAMS



KYLA LEE WARD

BOOK EXTRACT
of
KYLA LEE WARD
THE LAND OF BAD DREAMS

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Note: This extract contains the Contents pages of the complete work,
9 of the 25 poems, and 3 of the 15 illustrations.

In *The Land of Bad Dreams*, Kyla Ward offers up a rich, eccentric miscellany of dark music, skilfully crafted and strangely wrought.

ANN SCHWADER

Nocturnal, toothy, grisly and witty . . . a carnival of life's cruel and grotesque side, with much pageant and dark laughter.

K. J. BISHOP

The poetry of Kyla Ward is, much like its author, dark, intricate, and intelligent. A whisper of decadence, a hint of decay, and men and women wrapped in the linen of both.

BEN PEEK

Kyla has real presence “live” as she has too in these poems. There is a transfixing quality and a warning: “mind how you approach.”

DANNY GARDNER

Ward is a born poet, and knows what she is about in her work, which does, indeed, weave its own potent and subtle magics.

MICHAEL FANTINA

In *The Land of Bad Dreams*, one navigates by the lantern light of a goblin moon. It is a strange, dark region of the psyche where demons dwell.

WADE GERMAN

Delicious antiquity and delirious archaism mix and mingle in Kyla Ward's verse. With a true poet's sense of language she teases and tantalises the senses.

LEIGH BLACKMORE

Terror and the beauty it can evoke: that's what I expect from poetry like this—and that is what *The Land of Bad Dreams* gave me. This is a collection that should be welcomed.

ROBERT HOOD

THE LAND OF BAD DREAMS

KYLA LEE WARD

Edited by Charles Lovecraft

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KYLA LEE WARD (b. 1969) is an Australian writer, actor and artist devoted to all things dark and beautiful. Her poetry has previously appeared in *Midnight Echo*, *Bloodsongs*, *Abaddon*, and *Gothic.Net*, as well as in live performances. Her novel *Prismatic* (co-authored as “Edwina Grey”) won the 2007 Aurealis Award for Best Horror, and her short fiction has appeared in the likes of *Ticonderoga Online*, *Shadowed Realms*, *Borderlands*, and *Macabre: A Journey into Australia’s Worst Fears*. She co-edited seven issues of *Tabula Rasa* magazine, and two of her scripts have been performed on stage by the Theatre of Blood repertory company. Her website is Tabula Rasa: <http://www.tabula-rasa.info/KylaWard.html>

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INTRODUCTION

Dreams and poetry share an innate freedom. Both well from deep within the mind of the poet-dreamer, defying the ordered processes of consciousness. Symbols both universal and personal are allowed free play, producing new possibilities and insights. Travel is possible, and the compression and expansion of time. And, free of barriers as of censors, both may take those privy to the experience into places they might not normally approach. Yet bad dreams can contain valuable truths and dark poetry reveal a beauty inaccessible both to reason and to daylight.

—Kyla Lee Ward

The Land of Bad Dreams offers the reader a many faceted view of an extraordinary Australian poet, writer, artist and dramatic performer. In this first collection of Kyla Lee Ward's poetry and prose vignettes we see distilled her uniquely imaginative inner world, her inventiveness with language and poetic forms, and her command of imagery that draws upon past eras and long lost cultures.

The works herein have been selected for their themes of dark fantasy and myth. The volume is arranged in four sections titled Dreams, Fables, Biohazard, and a long poem, "The Feast of Mistrust." The selection covers all periods of Ward's life including the early pieces, "Herbal Tea" and "Night Cars," and works begun in her youth and completed in maturity such as "The Feast of Mistrust." Her own illustrations throughout, a bibliography of her work and an interview with her are revealing of her diverse creative abilities.

On meeting Ward in person, her presence, bearing and the drama of her personality immediately impress and fascinate. She is a consummate performance poet and this tells strongly in her written poetic style. Her poetry is, above all, made for speaking or reading aloud in her own

cultured Australian cadence. This characteristic explains much about the idiosyncrasies and strengths of her poetry.

Her poetic works usually tell a story or deliver a message as do most works within an oral tradition whether song, poetry or drama. For example, “The Soldier’s Return” tells the tale of a soldier’s expectations and revelations on his return home after the wars; “Deshayes Cradle Song” conveys that fate is inexorable, while “Exorcism” posits a rationalist view of the universe. Works such as “The Kite” and “Hymn” take the reader to distant epochs, while in “The Feast of Mistrust” she invokes the entire secret history of a city, building it, as it were, from the ground up.

Ward’s vivid imagination has been cultivated through many years of interest in Classical, Egyptian, medieval and gothic aesthetics and culture. Her writing is imbued with atmosphere based on a lifetime of immersion in these other worlds. Even the contemporary setting of “The Sculptor” is nuanced by references to classical Greece and Rome, and by Egyptian images.

Pace and rhythm are central elements in the recitation of Ward’s poetry: “I recognize pattern and rhythm, visually, aurally and conceptually.” She creates and enhances dramatic effects by shifts between formal and free verse. Formal rhythms, natural language rhythms and the rhythms of free verse are interposed to create pace and add dramatic effect to her performance. For instance, in “The Sculptor” she uses formal verse with eight syllables and both internal and end rhyme for the main structure of the poem, interspersed with free verse to render the ordinary speech of the protagonist. “The Grandchild” presents an inventive mix of lines—mostly rhymed; with lines of different lengths; lines with metrical feet of two or three syllables reminiscent of *amphibrach* and *amphimac* metre; and with unusual line breaks. This variation achieves changes of pace from hesitant or slow to a more even and stronger rendition. The merits of this unconventional style are best perceived when the work is read aloud as in the telling of a story.

However, her adeptness and discipline, in both formal and free verse are well evidenced by extensive writing in each mode. For instance,

“Mary,” “The Torturer’s Confession,” “The Flower Maid,” “The Battle Bride,” “Day Cars,” and “My Guest” are representative of her formal or semi-formal verse; “Night Cars,” “The Kite,” “Virgins and Martyrs,” “Exorcism,” and “Hymn” are representative of her free verse.

“The Feast of Mistrust” reveals both her inventiveness and control of formal poetic elements. She has devised and followed a predominantly iambic metrical pattern and unique rhyme scheme for 1,086 lines. This long work has 181 six-line stanzas with the following rhyme scheme: first line has no rhyme; second line rhymes with fourth line; third line has internal rhyme; and fifth line rhymes with sixth line. From “The Feast of Mistrust,” Part I, The Fear:

From eyes and ears and open maws
that cling to turret stone,
to carven head and sealing lead
that holds the dust and bone.
Ah, slow the church is sinking; it is but the dead who know
there’s inches less in crypt and rat-hole than a year ago.

In her use of language there are interesting shifts between older forms and contemporary idiom. Ward judiciously uses archaic and obscure language in creating and enriching other worldly settings, mood and atmosphere. In several poems she uses Latinisms, such as “*in nomine patris*” (“Virgins and Martyrs”), and “*lex talionis*” (“The Rat’s Repast”) enhancing settings and moods with detail specific to other times and places. “The Soldier’s Return” refers to a “jennet” (a small Spanish horse), connoting medieval Spain. Ward’s knowledgeable use of herb-lore also evokes medieval times: “vervain” (“The Soldier’s Return”); “hartshorn” (“The Torturer’s Confession”); “datura,” “must” and “ergot” (“The Feast of Mistrust”). A brief glossary is provided for the reader’s convenience.

Yet overall her language and usage is contemporary and widely accessible. Some pieces reflect modern urban vernacular, achieving pace, accessibility of meaning and special effects such as the intimacy of conversation, an aside or other theatrics, for example: “They want it so pure, so sweet and so sad, / and isn’t it sick that they want it so bad,”

from “Virgins and Martyrs.”

When considering the influences on Ward’s creativity, some names spring to mind instantly such as E. A. Poe. Similarity of their subject matter is obvious but comparisons may also be made between their use of the vernacular. For instance, most of Poe’s later poetry is written in the vernacular of the day and he consciously sought to reproduce the rhythms of conversation.*

However, there is evidence Ward’s reading and ensuing influences have been eclectic. For instance, her use of unconventional “line breaks” (“The Grandchild”) suggests familiarity with modern authors who use that device, such as the avid proponent of enjambment, E. E. Cummings (see his poem “old age sticks”). It is not surprising to learn that she was a precocious child, writing poetry before she went to school and continually developing her many arts, dark arts as she calls them, through her youth.

Though culture is a cumulative process and all creators stand on the shoulders of those who went before them, perhaps the compelling interest in Ward’s work is the extent to which her appreciation of poetic elements is uniquely manifested in her writing. The shifts of form, style and language express the essential, multi-dimensional, dramatic nature of Ward’s creativity. Read any piece and note the many perspectives, spaces and dimensions manifest there; the movement and energy to capture or explore these. There are no static, passive pieces; all are intricately wrought, tensioned, kinetic.

In the northern hemisphere mandrakes grow. Here beneath southern constellations, in our sunburnt land, Australia, strange, potent botanicals twist their roots through stony ground and strain upwards to our harsher, brighter light.

P’rea Press is proud to publish this first collection of Kyla Lee Ward, herself one of those strange, rare species.

—CHARLES LOVECRAFT AND J. T. ROSS

*Thomas Ollive Mabbott, from his “Introduction” to *The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1969).

THE LAND OF DREAMS GONE BAD

The parties have all run on too long
and the girl who hid too well
peers from the cracks, waiting for the game to end.
Here, abrasive twilight lingers on
a crust of wrap and shell
iced with cold wax, as scavengers descend.
Where have the girls and boys all gone?
To the car park and hotel
beside the tracks: there's nothing left to pretend
in the land of dreams gone bad.

Here, Cinderella cuts her foot,
the bad wolf wears a hood
and even witches die in the sights of a gun.
The executive have their input
and the story will look good
with colour pictures on the news at one.
Her parents wait amongst the soot
for her to appear as she should.
Her conscience twitches. But nothing can be done
in the land of dreams gone bad.

There was a prince; at least, she thought
it was his face she saw
within the scrying mirror where all things pass.
And even though it came to naught
she felt what she could; or
does he still lie trapped in a coffin of glass?
Perhaps a hundred years will sort
him out; one thing is sure,

a kiss won't pry him loose. Still, princes are sparse
in the land of dreams gone bad.

The palace should be somewhere near:
once, within the mirror she
saw masquers running light across the snow.
Through secret door, down the passage drear,
and in the court of night the
candles burn unending; for there is no
birthday there, no accreted year,
only everlasting beauty
and strength. But none will show her how to go
in the land of dreams gone bad.

It's late; surely they're calling now
or do only crows hover
harshly inviting her to the feast begun?
If she emerged with courtly bow
and wrapping paper over
her clothes, the sight might be a welcome one.
Dare she move, through broken gifts, how
painfully from cover,
into last light? Surely, by now, she has won
in the land of dreams gone bad.

MARY

Come into the graveyard, Mary,
hinderance of thorns defying.
Eyes that still can see are chary,
ears unstopped by clay are prying.
Through the trees like witches dancing,
deep into the twilight's bruising,
between their black fingers lancing
stones in shadow shape are losing.
Wind a-running through the grasses
makes the crow's head leap,
and as the rotting wreaths it passes,
sings itself to sleep.

Come into the graveyard, Mary,
past there the cold iron fencing.
Here no kin is watching wary,
no friend here goodwill pretending.
Past the doors that need not open
for their tenants always smiling.
Through the twisted branches groping
peer the clouds' dull eyes, beguiling.
Those beneath us deeply ground
the pathway that before us lies.
Step and down and turn around
and look me in the eyes.

Come into the graveyard, Mary,
E'en as sudden fear restrains.
Breathe the dust so deep and lairy,
feel the blood thin in your veins.
I am fire, I am lightness

and the roaring water's life
and now held here in the darkness,
you will always be my wife.
Flesh to mine and heart be numb,
for fingers cold, my dear,
entwined do not unclasp. Now come,
and know we shall lie here.

HERBAL TEA

Goblins sleep in the roots of herbs,
where cats' eyes peep in the roots of herbs.
Intricacies of tiny limbs,
of crawling, gnarled and hidden things.
Secret juices, fragrant life,
a monkshood and an iron knife
cross uneasy over the fey
rustles from the dim-dawned day.
Leathern books and old proverbs,
shadows creep in the roots of herbs.

Goblins hide in the roots of herbs,
careless bride in the roots of herbs,
garland-winding lost her way
forever; taken, here she lay.
Imprisoned, mingled, roots her grief,
her veil became the scented leaf
and in the earth the unkissed wife
found no grave but stranger life.
She waits by overgrown kerbs.
Secrets sighed in the roots of herbs.

Goblins lurk in the roots of herbs,
uncanny work in the roots of herbs.
Precious powers hold that stem,
strange aches of flesh are linked to them.
Feathered shard of root so round,
drawing deep to underground.
Kitchen windows, walls of brick,

in pavement cracks the hint will stick.
From castles to decayed suburbs;
oh, never shirk the roots of herbs.

Goblins watch in the roots of herbs,
r lore will cost in the roots of herbs.
Fear to enter such a maze
where distilled ichors cure or craze.
Seductive leaves their fragrance waft,
a half-seen hand, a hidden laugh,
and when such things are known to me,
what should I drink but herbal tea?
A toast! To all that peace disturbs,
and children lost in the roots of herbs.



Little Fangs

THE BAT'S BOUDOIR

Observe Madame Chiroptera, flitting from dresser to armoire and back once more to her cavernous bed. Observe, though this chamber within chambers is secluded from every breath of outside air, and there is no light save the phosphorescent face of the clock. Tapering fingers brush atomiser and jar, pluck bead and comb. She knows the location of the least pin. She knows the angle of the footstool to the chair, the curves of the ewer and basin. She knows the route, with its windings and turnings, its many confusing twists, which leads to the door outside. But that can, must wait until the incandescence of the world is tempered by night.

In the meantime, she makes her preparations. She swathes herself in silk and bone, a garment both armour and allure. Silver drops ornament her exquisite ears. Only her eyes are left unadorned. She cares for scent, does our Madame, and much for sound, but her eyes sense only the presence and absence of light. She wears those deep and clouded pools like a mask.

And so prepared she makes her way, at the appointed hour, through the secret ways of her house. There are in these chambers many locked chests and, strange to say, thickets of canes, groves of dinner jackets, and shoals of cigarette cases and watches lying in the dark. By the door, with its granite lintel, hang cloaks of every kind. But the one that envelops her when she steps outside is always the finest grey leather.

There is a space of alleys, of further twists and turns, and then she is among them. Upon the streets, as the gas lamps bloom against the evening sky, crowd the mayfly ladies and their magnificent moths. They trail gauzy veils and coils of gold wire spring from their brows, studded with topaz and aquamarine. Their fine whiskers quiver over velvet lapels, each supernally gorgeous, seducing the very light that draws them out to dance in the mild

air. Yet she passes in grey, her presence unremarked. By the sequence of lights, she picks a path to le Café Naturel. Here she sings.

A noted singer, our Madame Chiroptera, amongst a certain class. Let those who will, speak of The Nightingale, or that sultry performer, La Cicada. Madame Chiroptera is for the subtle, who can see a song passing through the smoke and feel it through the stem of a wineglass. The cloak parts and they see the pulsing of her constrained breast, the tiny jewels of her nails. And as she sings the café and all its accoutrements become real to her; each lamp, each table, each patron in their place. As she sings, she finds her prey. She seeks softness, sweetness, a tender youth in rich dress, and pitches her voice to him. She bends on him those wide, blind eyes and seems to beg for succour, for in this city all predators must go disguised, and the victim provides the tempo to the hunt. Velvet crosses her path, with a faint aroma of orchids. He is tall, this one, taller than she usually dares but so willowy, wavering there on the edge of her perception. He has fixed upon her, that is certain.

When she leaves the café he follows hesitantly, weaving back and forth in her wake. There is barely a rustle of coat, which she feigns not to hear, drawing him down through the alleys until, beneath a lone lantern, she turns. Her lips part, but not so wide as to reveal her teeth. Most need no further encouragement, but still this one hangs back, breath coming shortly. She must take the lead, expressing fear for his safety this deep in the maze and insisting she shelter him. They do not quite touch, she fluttering lightly and he still weaving around her, as they enter her lair.

In the dark she takes his sleeve to guide him past her hoard. This close, his scent is strong and she feels his grace, how smoothly he glides beside her. She will drain him first and set his husk to crumble in one of her many rooms. She will spend his money; then, if his belongings are unmarked, pawn them as she needs. Whispering softly, she draws him across the carpet of dust and fur and old lovers, into that deep chamber where the clock remains the only light, and everything is ready. Fingers

brush velvet, leather unfurls and they coil around each other, pressing tight.

His embrace is crushing; breath hissing into her face. She pulls back and is denied; they stumble, and the footstool topples. Nails scrape through velvet to reveal a cold roughness. No longer the shape of a sweet, young morsel but a living fetter, tightening about her with every beat of her heart. The bones of her corset begin to snap, but she cannot break free. How can this be? She who hunts without eyes, deceived by perfume and a shed skin? She feels his tongue curl against her cheek.

So that tongue she bites! As her fangs pierce the delicate organ, the coils around her spasm, yet she holds. Madame Chiroptera knows how to hold. He thrashes, battering dresser and drawer, grip squeezing and loosening, and she finds the space to flap! A terrible shudder runs through him from tip to tail, and she is free, beating and raking, clawing her way to the furthestmost niche in the uppermost arch of her bed.

And so we must leave them, bat screeching from the roof, snake writhing about on the floor. Both have been surprised in their night's adventures, and while the snake cannot see in the dark, the bat cannot fix on his ever-moving form, turning her bower into chaos. It may be they will have words to share, once they recover their dignity. For if there is one thing on which all predators of the city agree, it is that prey makes for boring conversation.

EXORCISM

I conjure thee, oh spectre of belief,
thou fractured multiple, father of conflict and mother of lies.
Leave these feeble bodies and minds weakened by love,
by hatred and fear of the unknown.
In the name of science self-examining, the sole perfectible,
appear before us now (in no alarming form); obey
the rod of measurement and that observant ring
through which the unseen is manifest. Appear!
That they may witness the power of the one
that casts the false priest from the temple
and strikes the black magician down.

I adjure thee, by the repetition of results
and mathematical models, by which we borrow years,
return now to the outer darkness
which we recognise as the darkness of our inner mind;
unconscious impulse, the residue of evolution.
The definition compels thee to the norm!
By the sacred names, that thou cannot fail to obey:
Serotonin! Hippocampus! Hypothalamus!
The meaning is the mechanism: that is all.
Let the rational rejoice.

I exorcise thee, that answers may be singular,
laws immutable and the dead stay dead.
Only flood and earthquake disturb our nights;
their causes sure, our response prescribed. We rest,
secure in the knowledge that there is no other:
only the average of processes we all share
and certain gendered traits. And on that great day
when time itself shall cease, we shall join each other,

the animals, our earth and the stars themselves
in thermodynamic cessation.

We have calculated this and as it must be,
desire it, for it is the measure of peace. Let all
take comfort in the ultimate end of truth.



3

Bonescape

VESPERS

For David

Blest be he who shuts my eyes
and who would place his hands on me.
Who in this dread hour would dare?
To touch the skin and part the hair,
the hands compose in stillness; he
stirs me enough to be aware
that he is here and cares for me.

Blest be he who veils my face,
who comes between me and the light.
For him is all my body laid,
the tender bound in bone and braid,
in loop and lace; a seemly sight
and every pain he sees displayed,
let him embrace without respite.

Blest be he who lays him down
to wait the night out at my side.
Enfolding me he is in turn
entwined, for he cannot unlearn
what he has known. All else belied,
still in this hour, for eterne
he—I alone will here abide.

MY GUEST

The light is running from the sky
like syrup from a broken glass.
I see there is a sallow cast
to every face; there was a dye
and now a nothing takes its place.
At this sign, I will go inside,
I will unbind and comb my hair.
I take the books from off the chair
next to my bed, that stands beside
me like a nurse with bowed head.
Could she have brought this glass to me?
I'll have no medicine in this room
and no light in the deepening gloom.
Between the curtain rings I see
plain nothing, and yet I am certain
that my guest can redeem it all.
My invitation is unspoken,
as I slide the window open,
tie curtains right against the wall,
and turn the chair round for the night.
Welcome darkness, welcome daemon
that holds my soul within its hands.
Come sit by me, we will make plans
to rise and overthrow. You came on
silent wings; soon, all the world shall know.

THE SLEEP OF REASON (CONCLUDED)

The white tower rose
and the brethren's castle fell, over aeons' span.
I died at their hands
and at my own: in youth, in age, as woman and man.
Such things to say!
I saw his eyes, took the cup from his hands,
a thousand lives too few
to wash such love away!
Could it be true?
If this is real, how can I bear the day?
For the strongest things will speak
when the night is running deep,
and ancient memories rise to test their prison.
So tell yourself you dream:
ever darkly speeds the stream
and heavy is the sleep of Reason.
Deathly is the sleep of Reason.

II. THE FARE

From those first monoliths raised
upon the bleak hillside,
a city grew where each man knew
fortune pursues the tide.
From those who gather oysters to the owners of the ship
that brings the wine and spices: all are in the river's grip.

And there lies a paradox
few people seem to note.
All those who count had rather mount
a dais than a boat.
The higher in the hierarchy, the higher up the hill,
and further from the water with its miasmatic chill.

Here, the houses huddle close
on cliffs and islands wrought
as stone decays to leave a maze
of mud and gravel, fraught
still further by the beggars, and each cozener and cove
who extricates a living out of what falls from above.

Doctor Wulf has dared far worse
to follow his crusade,
but his young escort would seem less
at home and more afraid
as they approach a humble house cut in the very rock,
with bars across the windows and upon the door a lock.

Nonetheless escapes a scent
of nutmeg and of cloves,
of vanilla and ginger jar
and something more than those;

whiff of familiarity, a place once smelt before.
Good Doctor Wulf, he doffs his hat and passes through the door.

Saucepans gleam upon the wall,
the wood waits in the hearth
and in the midst a woman sits
bound in a copper bath,
acknowledging his presence with a spray of bloody foam,
while eyes as mad as broken eggs revolve about her home.

A bandaged face attends her,
teasing at tangled hair.
A doleful man attempts to fan
the candy-scented air.
“Oh Papa, I have brought him! Quickly, let our mother see!”
Whereon a voice like creeping fire kindles: “It is he!”

Can she see him? Still her eyes
are rolling round and round.
Stepping closer: if he knows her
the change is more profound
than Lady Webbe; or is it not the woman but the *thing*
that has displaced the proper soul that so addresses him?

“Say then what you want of me
but warned be—I will not
assent to your possession or
this woman’s sorry lot!”
“Those are the very words,” it flares, “you spake the day you took
my servant and reduced her from an oracle to cook!”

“How long have I waited for
you, doctor, to return?
The hero who such things can do,
the mistress shall not spurn!”
“But I know *you*!” the doctor cries. “’Twas just such nonsense wild
Lucia raved so long ago!” And then he sees the child.

From either side fingers dig
into the skull: so calm
the chorist' stands, raising both hands,
an eye upon each palm!
No boy here but an agèd man with hunched and crooked back,
and in his wrinkled face a pair of sockets gaping black.

Gasping, Doctor Wulf falls back
against the bath, to feel
those feet and hands, like living bands,
draw him into a reel!
Still bound herself the madwoman sears joy into his ear:
"Soon now the master shall be free, at last the day is here!"

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Kyla Lee Ward (b. 1969) is an Australian writer, actor and artist devoted to all things dark and beautiful. Her poetry has previously appeared in *Midnight Echo*, *Bloodsongs*, *Abaddon*, and *Gothic.net*, as well as in live performances. Her novel *Prismatic* (co-authored as “Edwina Grey”) won the 2007 Aurealis Award for Best Horror Novel.

Kyla Lee Ward is a darkly shining poetic talent of Australia. The sweep of gothic landscapes and the howling shadowlands of dream in *The Land of Bad Dreams* propel readers towards old and new vistas of pandemonium, for compulsion is at the heart of Ward’s poetry ... compulsion to war against age-old human fears and terrors, and to triumph over them. Who dares fight them with her?

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Delicious antiquity and delirious archaism mix and mingle in Kyla Ward’s verse. With a true poet’s sense of language she teases and tantalises the senses.

Leigh Blackmore

Kyla has real presence “live” as she has too in these poems. There is a transfixing quality and a warning: “mind how you approach.”

Danny Gardner

Terror and the beauty it can evoke: that’s what I expect from poetry like this – and that is what *The Land of Bad Dreams* gave me. This is a collection that should be welcomed.

Robert Hood



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