

Evening Stroll by the Canal

Late today I turned east by the arched bridge at the village edge
to follow the canal's trajectory, between tall trees and low levee—
a strange wind blowing fitfully, rattling the sabres of a ghost cohort.

A swan is nesting on the bank, a queen upon her makeshift throne—
her consort tacking back and forth, anxious and alone.

A chill breath lifts the trailing ivy tendrils from the trunks of trees,
sings an eerie serenade in balls of mistletoe, ruffles the canal's
meniscus, sets it lapping like a cat.

I glance over my shoulder: it's deserted here, I should turn back,
but can't resist the stubborn invitation of the thread of track.
The channel is an enigmatic green, unwinding like a charm.
The more I walk, the more it lures me on.

The chateau and the village that I reach have strayed out of a tale.
I'll blink, and there'll be nothing there at all. I blink, but they are real:
"The Three Emperors," where three armies in turn set up
their headquarters, is solid as a rock. I am the revenant,
or so it seems, roaming stony streets like one possessed.

Walking back, I see the swan has tucked her head beneath her wing;
the male swan paddles fretfully, to guard her as she rests.

The northern European light drains swiftly to the west—
its running fire on the canal is doused.
The woods are listening, as if alert for signs of hobgoblins,
and there is something edgy in the wind...

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