

Eight

by
Christopher D. Ochs

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Eight

Christopher D. Ochs

Transcript of Statements of Mr. H. Basker, taken by Det. M. O'Keefe

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I first met Lucas Arlund in 1851, during London's Great Exposition. I was on a 'busman's holiday,' looking for new talent on behalf of my employer, the *Galerie L'Arc en Infini* near New York's Park Avenue. I chanced upon a few of his pieces on display in a local studio, and after several inquiries, I finally managed to find Mr. Arlund painting *au pleine aire* along a secluded pathway in the vicinity of Hyde Park. I introduced myself, giving him my business card. Lucas returned the kindness by showing me several of his finished pieces. His prodigious talent on the canvas was immediately apparent to me, though I could see his work still had a few rough edges. Nevertheless, I intuitively knew our gallery had to invest in Lucas.

Lucas was an amiable fellow, graciously accepting both my critiques and encouragements, and we quickly became good friends. We spent almost every remaining afternoon of my stay in London discussing his work, art in general, and other topics far and wide. I learned he was the eighth son of an eighth son, and...

Yes, Detective O'Keefe. We've all heard how lucky the seventh son of the seventh son is supposed to be. But Lucas maintained that in his family, the eighth of the eighth is even more auspicious.

To continue... Lucas and I discussed our plans for the future. He would go to one or more of the prestigious art schools in Europe as soon

as he could afford it, and I had dreams of managing a gallery of my own. On behalf of my employer, I purchased a few of his paintings to help both of us towards our respective goals. I also invited him to visit stateside when he felt he was ready, and to seek me out—either at my employer's salon or my own, should my plans for the future also come to fruition.

The next I saw Lucas was in 1853, during New York's own Great Exposition. He told me he spent a year each in the schools of Brussels and Paris, but it was in his homeland of Wales where he claimed to have perfected his technique. When I asked to what school he referred, he merely smiled and replied, “none you ever heard of.” He only said it was there that he truly learned the use of color in painting.

We're taught in the most basic art class about the color wheel with its six colors, he explained. Even the Almighty's own rainbow has only seven colors—though I confess, I cannot easily tell the difference between indigo and violet. But Lucas maintained it was during the last leg of his sabbatical he learned how to see the *eighth* color.

With that, he unveiled a series of paintings he had completed while residing in Wales. He entitled them *The Eight Fae*, and... Eh, detective? Yes, yes—the very same paintings that you suspect me of destroying. Now, where was I? Ah yes, the *Fae*—or the 'wee folk' as *you* might call them, Detective O'Keefe.

On the last month of the Great Exposition, our gallery held a showing and auction in honor of our sister exhibition two years prior, featuring various notable artists from the United Kingdom, including Mr. Arlund.

It truly is a loss to the art world that all of his paintings were destroyed, even more so in that my dear friend Lucas was murdered the same night. If you had seen any of *The Eight Fae*, you would surely understand. The composition, the brush technique, and most of all, the use of color and light instilled these paintings with a quality that was—dare I say it—magical.

When I first laid eyes upon them, it was almost impossible to tear my gaze away. And I was not alone in the curious effect these paintings had. Art critics, whom I previously thought possessed hearts of pure stone,

openly wept at the sight of Lucas' *Eight Fae*. After their adulatory reviews received print, crowds of visitors increased daily, until they filled the gallery to capacity. During the auction itself, events reached such a fevered pitch that, had the bidders not come from the *crème de la crème* of New York's society, several bouts of fisticuffs might have broken out that evening.

We had sold seven of the *Eight Fae* series. The first of the series, *The Tylwth*, went for an exorbitant sum. In its turn, each successive *Fae* painting went for even higher amounts. Even his darkest work, *The Gorfodwr*—or *The Enforcer* as he preferred to call it, as though he were somehow unsettled by its original title—fetched an extravagant final bid. When I inquired why on Earth he chose as its subject such a hideous monstrosity—a malevolent hulk hunched over with a beetled carapace and possessing hands with wicked eight-fingered claws—Lucas soberly replied that “not all *Fae* are fair to look upon.”

I, of course, must mention that before the auction, in appreciation for featuring his work, Lucas generously presented me with first choice of the series. Without a moment's hesitation, I selected *The FaeDaewyn*. A beautiful nude portrait, it was a study of a creature with the most delicate gossamer wings, the stature and easy poise of a goddess, and the face of an angel.

Eh? Detective, this is *my* statement, and I will make it as long or as short as *I* see fit. On the subject of Lucas' fate, it is already quite difficult for me to maintain my composure. Now if you would be so kind as to not interrupt again...

After the rousing success of our auction, Lucas and I adjourned to my employer's upper offices, and broke open several bottles of our finest cognac. I can only plead that I was deep in my cups, for late that night, I asked Lucas the one question that only an ignorant rube or an inexperienced cub journalist would ask—where did he get his inspiration?

I am still not quite sure of his answer, for by that time, his Welsh brogue had become quite difficult to wade through. The best I can recall is he claimed that the *Fae* in the deep forests of Wales recognized him as the eighth son of an eighth son, and knowing he was imbued with the ability

to see the eighth color—*wythfed* he called it—they revealed themselves to him. My initial reaction was to laugh at such fanciful nonsense, but I stopped mid-breath when I saw he was in full earnest. It was the *Fae* who had then taught him how to focus and refine his innate ability, or so he claimed.

Did you ever catch the flicker of something out of the corner of your eye, only to find it gone when you faced it directly? It is that eighth color, permeating this world just like any hue of red, yellow or blue, that sometimes distracts our attention. It is the eighth color that *we* can barely perceive, but Lucas could plainly see. And it was this eighth color Lucas had somehow cleverly woven into *The Eight Fae* that made them so compelling, so mesmerizing.

The day after the auction, our respective fortunes were assured. Lucas had amassed enough monies from his share of the proceeds, that he bought and restored a small castle in the forests near his ancestral home of Talgarth, Wales. I became the new wunderkind impresario of the American and European art worlds. From such newfound fame, along with my finder's fee and commission, I was able to open my own galleries both here and in Europe within a scant few months.

Lucas continued to paint in Wales, but became a bit of a recluse, never showing any of his newer pieces. For my part, my art galleries became so successful that I seldom left New York, except for business concerns. As a result, our friendship slowly diminished. We would occasionally trade letters, but the distance that separated us, compounded with the years that passed by, slowly and inexorably eroded our once strong relationship.

Normally, I would assuage my conscience with the excuse that many friendships die a quiet death—even when their members live but a few towns apart, let alone separated by the Atlantic Ocean. However, it is to my own disgrace that I did not reach out to Lucas after receiving his last few letters.

With each passing year, I noticed that his writings became progressively disjointed and confused, until the last one seemed positively deranged. His previous year's letter suggested that I seal up my *Fae*

painting, and never again show it to anyone. His final letter, which arrived just last month, indicated that he was selling all his worldly goods in order to buy back the entire series. As if anyone would be willing to part with them at *any* price!

You can imagine my great surprise when Lucas showed up unannounced at my doorstep last night. He looked positively a fright. Soaked by the rain, he was haggard and gaunt beyond repair, with a haunted look of desperation in his eye. No sooner had I admitted him into my house than he slammed the door shut, fumbling at its lock. After nervously checking the windows, he seized me by the shoulders, demanding to know what I had done with *The FaeDaewyn*. His face twitching at every slightest errant sound from the storm outside, he asked repeatedly if I had sealed it up as he had requested, and for what sum would I be willing to sell it?

I tried to calm him down, and assure him he was in no danger. We went to the front parlor, where I poured him a stiff drink to help allay his fearful manner—but to no avail. He only became more agitated, babbling phrases like “I shouldn't have painted them,” and “They are angry with me now.” When I asked him what the devil he was going on about, he shrieked something barely coherent about “things not meant for you to see.”

Lucas persisted in his demands concerning the whereabouts of his painting, and I finally conceded that *The FaeDaewyn* hung in my upstairs study. No sooner had I turned to refresh his drink, than he struck me down with a roundhouse punch that still makes my jaw ache. By the time I had gotten my feet back underneath me, Lucas had already made his way to the study. I gave pursuit, but was too late. I entered my study to find Lucas already at work, slashing my precious *FaeDaewyn* with the letter opener from my desk.

What happened next, I cannot say precisely. I recall rushing forward to restrain him, but I was instead knocked back by something akin to a flash of lightning, and a thunderclap that more closely resembled a deafening roar. The doors opening to the balcony were blown off their hinges, and the room flooded with a strange light. I am at a loss to

describe its weird color—just as I cannot differentiate between indigo and violet, I am equally unable to discern what I saw. The last thing I am able to clearly recall is Lucas' scream of “*Gorfordwr!*” before my mind was overcome with the unearthly deafening brightness.

The next thing I knew, it was morning, and my groundskeeper was rousing me to consciousness. It is to his credit that he did not faint or run away when he found me in the wreckage that was formerly my study. I was covered in, and laying in a pool of blood. *The FaeDaewyn* was shredded to tatters, and its frame shivered into a thousand splinters. And what remained of poor Lucas was splashed across three of the study's four walls.

I know full well that you and your superiors consider me the prime suspect in Lucas Arlund's murder and the destruction of all of his paintings. Yes, detective, I have ears! I have already heard about the bulletins the police have received from the neighboring precincts, where owners of the other *Fae* paintings reside. But, before you continue down that particular path, allow me to point out several inconsistencies in your accusations.

First of all, the doors from the study's balcony were blasted *inwards*. Second, you must have observed that my outline was perfectly preserved in blood and broken glass on my study floor, so I must have already been rendered unconscious when poor Lucas was murdered. The only footprints found in his drying blood were those of my groundskeeper. If we can agree on those points, how then can you continue to believe I could destroy all of Lucas' paintings across the city in a single night?

And last but not least, do you think that I, with my dull letter opener, could so completely disembowel Mr. Arlund, and furthermore, leave the walls of my study scored with those grotesque, unworldly marks, as if by eight-fingered claws?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher D. Ochs' foray into writing began with his epic fantasy *Pindlebryth of Lenland*. His short stories have been published in the *GLVWG* and award-winning *BWG* anthologies and websites, and by *Firebringer Press*. Using his skills learned with the *LVSG*, he crafted a collection of mirthful macabre short stories, *If I Can't Sleep, You Can't Sleep*. His latest novel is a gritty urban fantasy/horror, *My Friend Jackson*, a Finalist in *Indies Today's* Best Books of 2020.

His current projects include: two sci-fi/horror novels *Sentinel of Eternity* and *No Place Like Home*; a prequel novella and a second novel in the *Pindlebryth* saga.

Chris has too many interests for his own damn good. With previous careers in physics, electrical engineering and software, CGI animator, classical organist, voice talent on radio, DVD and OTAKON, it's a wonder he can remember to pay the dog and feed his bills.

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