

Poisoning the Well
Written by Ryan Meier

The beast screamed in glee, howled in ecstasy, bellowed in joy. It rolled around in the mud and sludge of its swamp-like lair, giggling and laughing as it writhed in its own filth. It was happier than a pig in shit.

It had spent uncalculatable time in the village, taking each growing opportunity to spread its horror to as many villagers as it could. It started with the best of them, instinctively knowing that elimination of its greatest adversaries would be the quickest path to victory.

It visited the church, whispering lust and pervasion in the ear of the priest as he slept silently, clutching his crucifix tightly in both hands over his chest. It visited the Rabbi, illuminating the darkness that resides in the human heart; the bitterness of those dreams worked to sour the Rabbi's hopes for humanity, the passion of his life's work.

It visited the husbands and wives, inserting images of dreams and lust into their minds - whispering carnal desires for their neighbor's spouses. It snuck into their children's rooms, turning them green with envy for the possessions of their schoolmates. It read them bedtime stories that described the darkest parts of the human soul, teaching them the only way to boost their own self-worth was to tear each other down.

The beast went to the business owners and politicians, twisting their compassion for their neighbors, whispering notions of greed. Why support the community when you can fatten your purses and grow your influence? Cut off the starving boy's hand for stealing bread to feed himself and his sister, mock the man too poor to provide luxury for his family.

The average man, the common laborer, tossed and turned in his sleep. Their hard work and tireless labor spent farming food, building homes and community buildings, all while repairing leaky roofs in the middle of the night. They couldn't see his own value. They toiled over possessions they lacked, material things they couldn't provide. They dreamed of the end, of an endless sleep that would provide much needed rest and relieve his torment. Without them the community would die, but they could only see the village thriving in their absence.

The people suffered and they fought, bickered and squabbled. They raised fists, brother against brother. They hid behind their closed and locked doors, whispering and gossiping about one another, destroying each other's character to anyone who would listen, without the hint of knowledge and understanding of who that person truly was. This anger and hate planted roots deep inside, spreading like wildfire.

The villagers plotted and schemed. They were jealous of possessions and relationships, Green, envious eyes sought opportunities to steal what wasn't theirs. Compassion fell out of their vocabulary. Kindness, empathy, and love faded. Their town rotted from the inside out; after all, the core of every village resides in the hearts of its inhabitants.

The men and women would eventually raise pitchforks, light torches, and slowly work their way through the community, killing and burning, violating and murdering as they went. Would it all be metaphorical? I'll leave that for you to decide. They all believed in their hatred were true and justified; never believing the beast was real. Trust me, friends, the beast is very real.

It rose from its filth and hobbled towards the only possession it had ever owned, the only thing it had ever desired. An ornately adorned mirror, covered in dirt lay at the base of an

ugly, rotting tree. The beast lumbered over and used an indescribable paw to wipe the mirror clean, revealing its reflection. The faces of each village member stared back, hatred seething from their eyes, wickedness intertwined into each of their evil sneers.

The beast cackled and the villages cackled back. No one forced evil behavior, it was not innate. The villagers only let themselves slowly drink the bits of poison that dripped into each of our moral wells.