

## **THE SINGING TIDES – by Bradley Garnham**

My grandmother once led me along a winding coastal path, one windy winter's morning many years ago. There was a cold and quiet mist about us as we trudged along the beach, accompanied by a biting wind which nipped our necks and hands. I watched in quiet envy as her dog bounced across the surf and shore, oblivious to the chill which had me burrowed in my coat. Perhaps through spite or boredom, as we shuffled on our way, I occasionally grabbed a rock or stone and tossed it to the water, listening as it splashed into the frigid sea.

I was unaware of what this broken coast had lost already. Unaware that murky waters sometimes throw things back.

I didn't notice it at first, in fact I hardly noticed it at all. A soft and subtle song that rose up from the depths, sailing inwards with the waves and onwards past the hills, before it faded gently into the marshy fields beyond. The tune was faint and distant, like the memory of a memory. Some dark and ancient sound that had long since been forgot. A chorus of discordant bells, unlike anything I'd heard before, who sang with many voices, some who whispered, some who roared.

It froze me in an instant and forced my gaze towards the water, staring out into the haze to find its unseen source. The mists began to thicken as their ghostly chiming grew. Bong ... tolled the bells, rising quickly from the sea. Bong ... they came again, growing louder than before. Bong ... those voices cried, from their graves beneath the shore.

I felt the world grow cold and dim, as shadows smothered light, guided by the music to some dark and wretched place. A torrent thundered from above as the waves began to roil, jagged bolts of lightning giving form to the figures in the gloom. Suddenly there stood a town, where nothing stood before, laid bare beneath the rolling storm and helpless in its wake. The bells were screaming through the night as people fled their homes, only to be caught and dragged into the raging sea. I watched as houses splintered and as mighty buildings fell, as towers built to honour god were taken in his wrath. This is what they sang of, this calamity that came. Of the greed and hunger of this beast that swallowed everything it found; their memories of all they'd lost, and would never see again.

I felt my grandma tug my hand, and I snapped back to her side, awoken from a trance I never noticed I was in. I never spoke of what I heard, or thought I had that day. Even now it frightens me to wonder what it was. Because I know that I heard something, on that quiet, forlorn shore. Some sad, forgotten music, made by sad, forgotten things. The distant chime of ancient bells, that called out from the depths. A mournful dirge for those long past, who'll ring them nevermore.