

The Haunted Coins

by strannikov

I began collecting silver dollars after a modest lottery win, Morgan dollars then Peace dollars, later expanding the range of the collection by dates, denominations, and mintage.

Eleven months ago, I found my first Barber half dollars, almost a third of an ounce of silver apiece. The dealer I shopped from had two together in a small paper envelope, the coins and the little envelope all dated 1912, neither coin in mint condition but they'd held up well (the eagles on the reverse of each coin still had most of their feathers displayed intact). He had no idea why the pair had come wrapped together this way, they'd come in a few days earlier from the home store down in Charleston. I had been curious enough to ask what could be known about them, but my curiosity satisfied, I was also keen to pick the pair up for \$36.

Most of my collection of Morgan and Peace dollars I'd committed to my bank's safe deposit box: I have about ten of each left, I've had some mounted in bezels over the years as gifts, another few went to a handful of waitresses. This pair of Barber half dollars I kept at home in the bedside drawer with my .38, just to pull out and marvel over from time to time, most of the time forgetting about their pairing but at other times acutely aware that the two belonged to a pair, deserved to be set and displayed side by side. (Yes, like a pair of eyes.)

These century-old coins have been staring their silver eyes ever since, it's been months and moons already of staring, even in my sleep. (I woke once from a bad dream to throw them from the drawer, but my hands were so clammy, the coins stuck to my hand! I had to scrape them off my palm on the edge of the table.)

I heard or read somewhere that Barber half-dollars were once the go-to coin to rest the eyes of the freshly dead. This would be consistent with any explanation of how my pair had come to be matched as a set for so long (the little envelope was quite yellowed, the paper had a texture and stiff feel unlike what you might find

today, and the handwriting of the date had an antique look that I once spotted in the handwriting of great-aunts and great-uncles and grandparents). These eyes stare from death, their dull silver stare could not be conscious of the interval they stare from or upon.

But these eyes are conscious! I discovered this last month, when I placed the coins on my own eyelids, under the soft light of a full moon. I know silver is no "lunar metal" just as gold is no "solar metal": yet only under a full moon did the stare of these coins drop into me.

These eyes have since acquired a voice, a voice that sinks deeper night after night, just as these horrible coins have dropped their stare into me.

--Make yourself vulnerable, I said.

--I am mortal already.

--Open your voice somehow, I can hardly hear.

--But we talk each day, you've never reproached me for silence.

This voice only sinks its mourning into me: this staring voice mourns, then it petitions pleads and invites—not to get closer into me, but to draw me to the other side of those eyes . . .

-END-

