

Singing, Laughing
by Eric Cecil

The man sits at the table, and the lights flicker off and on.

When they're shining, the man is still and forlorn. But the darkness stirs him to song. As the lamps gutter and fade, a high voice wheedles an obscure melody: the lyrics senseless and immemorable, the voice lilting with tuneless enthusiasm.

At the next full show of light, the man returns to silence, frowning at his hands.

Go ahead, I say, leaning over the table. Do that again. He doesn't respond. Not until the next spell of darkness, which arrives so suddenly and totally that it seems to flatten all. The man meets it with the low, rolling growl of laughter.

I try to summon the lights again, hoping to usher silence into the room. I can't. So I retreat, instead, to the depths of the house: just as black as his laughter, just as endless.