Manastash

Volume 35: Spring 2025

Letter from the Editor

Dear Manastash readers,



The unseen exists around us. From the world of dreams to the higher powers one may or may not believe in, the mystical and mythological shadows our every footstep. For thirty-five years, *Manastash* has published the work of Central Washington University students, edited and published by Central Washington University students. In this issue, we step into the realm of the unseen, the intangible, and the hidden aspects of existence. We explore the boundaries between reality and fantasy. Stepping outside of the bounds of traditional storytelling, we offer readers a journey into the mysterious and the unexplored corners of the human experience.

The 35th Anniversary issue of *Manastash* was a labor of love by everyone involved. We send out our thanks to our editors, who worked to select and edit the pieces you see in this journal. To our design team, who put the pieces together. To our printing team, who ensured this copy would be in your hands. To our website team, who created an accessible digital format for this journal. To our promotion team, who advertised the journal. To our event team, who organized our Launch Party. And to our contributors, whose work fills these pages. This journal would not have been possible without you.

Thank you. Sheila I. Richardson Managing Editor

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2026, VOLUME 36

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS



THEME: REBIRTH

The theme for next year's *Manastash* is Rebirth. This could be literal rebirth in the sense of reincarnation, or the transformation from winter to spring, but it's open to symbolic rebirth, the changing of minds or bodies, the recovery of endangered species, the saving of an ecosystem or the reviving of a community. It can even be as simple as the idea that we are never exactly the same person from one day to the next. Anyone or anything reborn is fair game.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

- *Manastash*, Issue 36, 2026 is seeking poetry, prose, hybrid work and visual arts with theme around "Rebirth".
- Prose includes fiction, creative non-fiction, and flash fiction. Please keep submissions under 2,000 words.
- All submissions must be original and not published elsewhere including personal blogs and collections.
- You can submit up to 5 entries per genre (poetry, prose, visual arts). Please submit each piece as a separate file. If you are submitting more than one poem, please send one file containing all your poems.
- Poetry, prose, and mixed media entries accepted file formats .doc, or .docx.
- Do not write your name or any identifying information inside the file. Submissions will be read blindly. Include your name only in the file name.
- Visual art entries must be submitted at publication-quality with at least 1920×1080 resolution and 300 dpi. Visual artwork is only accepted in these file formats .jpeg, .png, or .tiff.
- All submissions should include a 50-word maximum biography, author/artist name, and title of work. Please inform us if the piece is titled "untitled."
- Submissions should be emailed to Manastash@CWU.edu.

DEADLINE: FEBRUARY 6, 2026, FRIDAY



Patient Apocalypse

Erin Moine

HE stands atop wet concrete, her porcelain skin cracked, like parchment.

She watches with eyes of deep ink, eyes undulating, like a worm in blood.

Her dress is a dreadful ivory ocean of swaying like a dancing mantis.

Her hair reminds me of thin, shadowy wires, hanging like a river from her oily scalp.

She blinks once.

I don't dare blink in return.

I cannot look away.

I hold my breath.

She does not breathe. My breath catches in my throat.

She blinks again, and smiles red. Her teeth are razors, decorated inhuman.

She waits at the bottom of the driveway.

Her patience is an apocalypse.

Conscious Nightmares

Emily McNealy

OTAL blackness, my eyes lack to see.
As panic arises, I stagger my feet.
Visions of creatures arise in the dark,
Deep in the shadows with forms still so stark.

Corporeal things my arms do evade,
I'm thrashing around and kicking my legs.
Where have I gone, if not insane?
In this despair I've lost my own name.

Ravenous monsters lean on my mind,
Twist and lurch and claw up my side.
I fling my body, there's a stab in my back;
A light flickers on with a hum and a crack.
All my memories fall back into place,
No longer distanced by time and space,
A familiar empty I've existed before,
These mental tricks of death and war.

Not quite awake but not quite asleep, This other plane I wade in so deep.

Unseen Dreams

Lesli Saige Johnson

long dreamed of what rested On the other side of the fabled fairy rings At my grandmother's house hidden in the lush lawn abundant brown capped mushrooms Marked the pathways between their world and mine I could only dream of what was on the other side Creatures I could just barely not see Borrowers or Minish or Memegwesi Lilliputians Koroks Spren Sprites Kodama Guardians of the wild ways of the world Often only seen by good girls and boys I yearned to travel the fey marked paths Journey on an incredible adventure of my own Despite warnings read in my fantastical tomes I'd eagerly jump into each fungi-formed ring Plagued by disappointment when my surroundings Remained of my own earthen realm I wonder now, years later If I'd still step into something new

Start afresh along another avenue

To escape my current trajectory

I do not think that I would

Mind you my hope in such fantasies remains the same

But rather I have found some semblance of satisfaction

A desire and connection to my new home

And while I am more than content to stay

You may yet see me driven by nostalgia

And childlike wonder I refuse to abandon

Step into the pathways of those who yet remain unseen

Seasons of Humanity

Emily McNealy

HEN the leaves change the trees,

Well, they root inside of me, And take over all the weeds Summer seeded in the reeds.

All the light may start to die,
But something else comes alive.
Sweet softness in its wake;
A breeze bones ache to shake.

It's no spell the hunger yearns to quell,
But a deep desire. From heat it dwelled,
Now in the cool the fever simmers.
I learn the moon shines no dimmer.





Midnight Veil

Erin Moine

T walks beside you in the dark—
—dark as the star-studded quilt covering the sky at midnight.

Midnight, the time in the ouroboros when the Veil sheds a layer, like a Copperhead sheds a layer of skin.

The skin of the Veil, this pulsing creature this cryptid of malice, evanescence, and poise.

You don't see it immediately.

Seeing it won't birth belief—
yet, *feeling* it, following you
as you sleep,
as you eat—was that a moldy blueberry?—
as you walk in the dark of midnight stars.

Steps faltering, nostrils burning, vision swimming like a Venus Girdle comb jellyfish, invisible, *most* of the time.

Science will call it anxiety, hallucinations, or grief. Intuition will speak louder than silent screams, a silence that screams to the part of you hiding behind disbelief.

The midnight stars decorate the Veil—unseen, yet felt—it doesn't wait for belief to creep.
A silent beating heart, pushing blood through your ears.

The Veil exists with midnight, as you exist upon this Earthen soil.

Iron and Earth

Jordan Cagle

There were nights when the Moon was full and very, very low, and the tide was so high that the Moon missed a ducking in the sea by a hair's-breadth; well, let's say a few yards anyway. Climb up on the Moon? Of course we did.

—Italo Calvino, "The Distance of the Moon" in Cosmicomics

can go months without thinking about the moon; months without ever seeing that yellow pock-marked disk rupture the thick membrane of darkness.

Then there are nights like these.

The moon has nowhere to hide at Vicky's place, in the center of farmland where the main crop isn't wheat or even strawberries but grass seed. It rises above those uniform fields so big and bright to inspect each blade of grass and ensure it is just like its neighbor.

It seemed like a waste of acreage to farm a crop whose only purpose was to corrupt more arable land in the name of aesthetics. Yet, as I pulled in front of Vicky's place, which was now technically my place, and put the car in park, I thought about how she was, I was, in desperate need of a lawn. The pale-yellow farmhouse with its white shutters, so clean and so prim, was surrounded by black earth which transformed into a mud pit in the spring and fall, rock hard in the winter and summer. I stepped out of the car and my boots squelched. Spring was heavy in the air like a narcotic vapor, and I froze because the moon stared at me, scanning me like one of those blades of grass. I smiled and closed my eyes, letting its

gaze trace me, and basking in

its warmth. That was what I loved most about Vicky's place, my place; every time I'm there I'm in the center of the world and completely detached from it. I'm reminded of the moon and how, despite all of the bad and the mundanity, there is something magical about this earthly existence.

I deposited my muddy boots on the porch and unlocked the front door with a shaky hand. The house bore the silence of a daytime robbery and carried the same anxious desire to be caught in the act. I laughed nervously, an intruder in my own home, in the house that once belonged to the woman I still loved and will always love.

The house was intimate and foreign like hiking through a familiar wood bathed in moonlight rather than sun. I noticed as if for the first time all of the items that made Vicky's home what it was. All the knicknacks and furniture, the lamps and clocks, the pictures and rugs. On a shelf, was a scaly shoot of bamboo coral we found on our first trip to the coast. I didn't want to take it, but Vicky was adamant that it was special. She was right. I ran my finger across its bumpy surface and like brail it revealed something: salty sea air, her hand laced in mine, waves, roaring sea lions. They were just things, yes, but some beautiful feeling washed over me. She'd handpicked each item to create a home. They were the stars that produced the constellation and being among Vicky's stuff again, her desire enveloped me and I could wade forever through that warm glow. My trail eventually led me to the garage because my mission was simple: secure a pie from the deep freeze.

I lifted the lid. It gasped and yellow light pooled in the frost-lined chest, revealing an enormous baking tray covered in foil. A red envelope was waiting on top, a single word scrawled on it: Cleo. My heart raced and tears blurred my vision. I couldn't handle seeing my name written in my love's familiar handwriting. My hand shook, maybe it had never stopped shaking, as it reached for the envelope. Inside, was a folded piece of computer paper with a short message scribbled in reddish-black script: *Bake at 375 for 83 minutes*.

I checked the back. Nothing. I reread the message, letting it tickle the memory center of my brain. I removed the heavy tray from its coffin, carried it to the kitchen, and preheated the oven without once stopping to consider the wisdom of following orders from the dead. I guess I was just grateful to hear from her.

While the mystery tray was cooking, I found some bourbon in the liquor cabinet and drank it, sitting at the kitchen table, waiting for the memories.

Vicky.

Her life was beautiful and simple, her death bloody and self-inflicted. They found her on the kitchen floor, a neat circle of blood traced around her. She'd been sick for a long time and decided to sacrifice herself for something. Who knows what?

In my last memory of her, I drove from town after weeks of no contact and entered the house. Vicky would disappear during her lows. I checked on her to make sure she was eating, bathing, and stuff like that. All of the lights were off. It was silent.

"Vicky!" I yelled.

There was nothing. No sound. The stench of mildew and decay filled the space. I rushed into the kitchen – fearing the worst – and found her sitting at the kitchen table, staring. Her hair a greasy mess. She wore stained pajamas. The sink was full of dishes. My hand went to my mouth, but then I suppressed my judgment, sitting across from her, and forced my frame into her eyeline.

"Babe, you don't look so good," I said.

She looked into my eyes. I don't think she saw anything.

"Do you remember how we met?"

Nothing.

"Two silver foxes on the apps. Sifting through girls who wanted nothing to do with us or wanted too much. And then somehow, some way, we got matched with each other."

I think I saw the faintest hint of a smile, but the mind likes to play tricks.

"I used to say we'd swiped through every eligible lady in the county before finding each other. It didn't take much for you to convince me to come over and maybe I shouldn't have been so easy but talking to you made me easy. I'm normally very respectable."

She was definitely smiling.

"It was a hot summer night and you made the best damn mojitos I've ever had. We sat on the porch and you pointed out constellations I'd never heard of. Then you led me down to this pond and it reflected the full moon so the dark water looked golden. You stripped off all of your clothes and jumped in. Then, like an idiot, I followed you."

She chuckled. She actually chuckled. I'd never been so happy.

"I still laugh about that. Couple old ladies, swimming in the moon, and giggling like teenagers. It was silly. But that's the thing about love. It makes you silly at any age. I knew I loved you on that first night and I still love you now."

All I wanted was for her to say it back. Please say it back.

"He's still inside of me, you know," she said.

"What?"

"The baby. Doctor said it was a miscarriage. But I know he's still in there and he's been in there all these years. What do you think is making me so crazy?"

"You're not crazy, babe," I said. "Maybe a little imbalanced."

She laughed and I laughed with her.

"Listen to me," she said.

I did.

"I know that oven. 83 minutes at 375 is perfect. Not a minute more."

The oven timer dinged. I returned from my painful reverie. I extracted the tray with oven mitts and placed it on the counter. A liquid sloshed around inside and spilled over one corner as the aluminum tray bent slightly. A blackish-red puddle formed on the white tile countertop. I hesitated, getting the same feeling of apprehension I got before dissecting a fetal pig in seventh grade.

Rage.

Unexpected rage pushed all other emotions to the side.

How dare Vicky do this to me.

How dare she bring me into her life only to vanish into her illness.

I never held it against her. I knew it was out of her control, but was I wrong to hope our love would be enough to fix her?

I yanked the foil back and steam erupted from the dish. The smell

of iron and earth was overwhelming. I felt the heat of bourbon in my throat. The thick reddish-black liquid in the tray simmered. It surrounded an island of mud, shaped conspicuously like a baby. It had small arms, small legs, a body, a baby-sized head, and a baby-sized penis. The face was remarkably detailed and one could even say the sculpture was cute if it wasn't so strange.

Then he opened his eyes.

I screamed and jumped back. He stared for a moment. The whites of his eyes popped against his muddy flesh. Then he cried. A series of wet, haggard, and pathetic sobs. It was heartbreaking. I found some pink, elbow-high cleaning gloves under the sink and put them on before hoisting the little guy from his dark crimson bath. I held him at arm's length, bouncing and cooing, doing my best to console him while leaving muddy red drops all over the floor. He stopped crying and looked at me with curiosity, then concern as if he seriously doubted my parenting abilities.

We stared at each other, sizing one another up, me rocking all the time. I opened my eyes wide and yelled "Boop!" in a high-pitched voice. His eyes went big, his mouth formed an o, and he started a little, but then he squealed with joy. His little giggles infected me like a virus and soon we were both laughing hysterically. My joy slowly evolved into tears of sadness. He sensed my sorrow and started babbling, trying to convince me of all the good in the world without actually saying a word. From that day forward, I was in love.

He grew up fast, not in the parenting time flies kind of way, but literally. Every month aged him a year. And with a little trial and error, we figured out a routine. Tarps for sheets and rubber clothes. He ate a lot of beef.

We got used to people staring. It was a small town and people weren't used to seeing single mothers out and about, especially one of such advanced years. I think the grocer was mad because of his muddy footprints on the clean linoleum. We built a life together and I was happy again, raising Victor in that little yellow farmhouse. It was a different kind of happy, but happy nonetheless.

One night, six months in, I made mojitos to celebrate the dwindling days of summer. They weren't as good as Vicky's but they went down

smooth on the porch with the stars above, and the moon swollen like a ripe fruit ready to be plucked from the vine. Its reflection on the pond was a happy memory.

Victor had been unusually quiet that evening. He was still learning to speak, but that had never stopped him before. When he saw the pond, something changed in him. He got real irritable and kept pointing at the liquid moon. "Swim! Swim!" He repeated, getting more restless all the while.

"No," I chanted.

But it wasn't enough. I couldn't catch him before he ran and dove head-first into the moon. I followed. I searched for my mud boy in a mud pit and almost cried at the futility. Every squishy handful could've been chunks from Victor, his poor body buried beneath my nails. Then my hand struck something firm. I pulled it up and discovered not an arm made of mud but of flesh and blood. Then Victor's head crested the surface. He had thick, dark hair and, even in the dim light, I could see his long eyelashes. There was a shocking resemblance to Vicky. I had to remind myself to breathe as we treaded water, staring at one another. There he was. My beautiful boy.

"Swim," he said.

"Yeah, babe. We're swimming," I said and did a backstroke across the lunar surface, smiling at the wonder of it all.

Dance of the Diplomats

Tyler Morello

OMEWHERE off in a foreign oasis shuffles a summit of suited men, shaking hands and bowing, feigning courtesy,

a grayscale congregation.

Emissaries gather from far corners of the globe, crowding embassies: glass houses that reverberate the threat of throwing stones.

These agents represent the profligate, the immoral world's string-pullers, masters of the ministerial marionettes,

parroting their voices.

They always look the same – formal dress, pins, medals, and ribbons. But they speak in translated tongues,

reliant on ciphers.

There is a symmetry to their motions, rhythmic manipulations: countries match head to head, eye to eye.

Conflict in 4/4 time,

and yet a pressure, as each voice attempts to be the bomb squad knife that cuts the right wire, averting crisis, sparing the boots and bullets.

Theirs is an underhanded peace. I do not belie a war within myself.

My anatomy signs armistice accords of its own in blood red ink, on the X of dotted line arteries:

the self, a shared world.

In peacetime, the mind sends its ambassadors fruitlessly to the heart, the self-proclaimed sovereign of the body,

to be stopped at the doors.

The body is led by the leash of the heart, its impulsive executive, to chase its interstellar out-of-body fancies;

other organs strung along.

The brain and its nerves, entities of cold electric rationale, sending its signals in synaptic morse,

still responds too slowly.

Smaller allied nation-states still get their seats at the players' table: lungs to air grievance, muscles to support,

guts to garner energy.

Antibodies, the world's couriers, relish diplomatic immunity, while bones lobby for joint resolution; together one whole vessel.

The self employs the same checks and balances that legislature calls to order, for a body at war with itself never profits, never prospers.

never profits, never prospers.

[insipid]

Christian Bauer

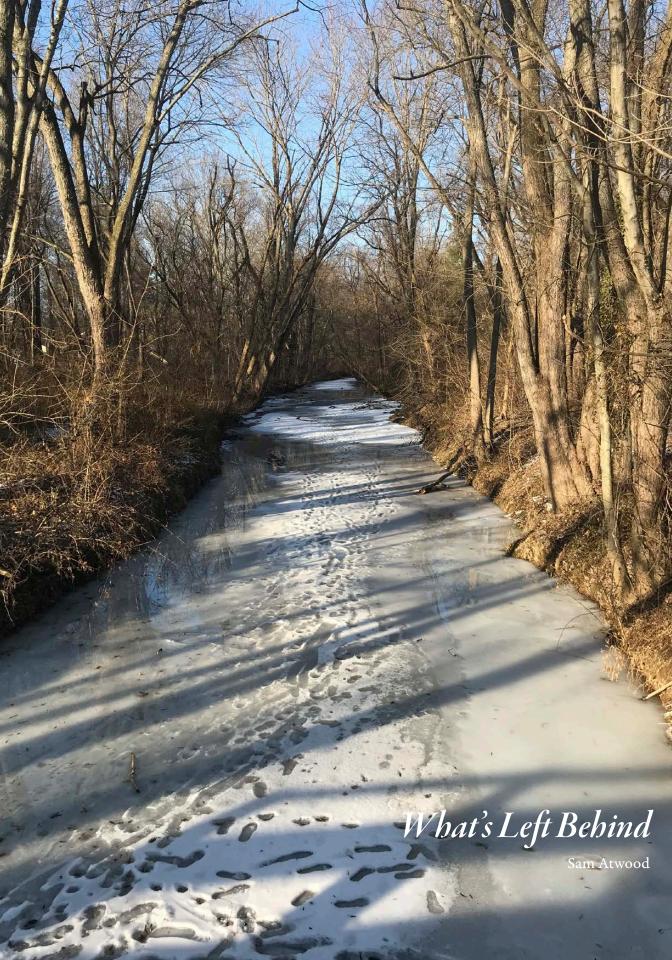
'DAY everythin's a shade of off-white Like grainy movies binged in the late-night Comin' to's a little fuzzy Got me asking 'really was he'?

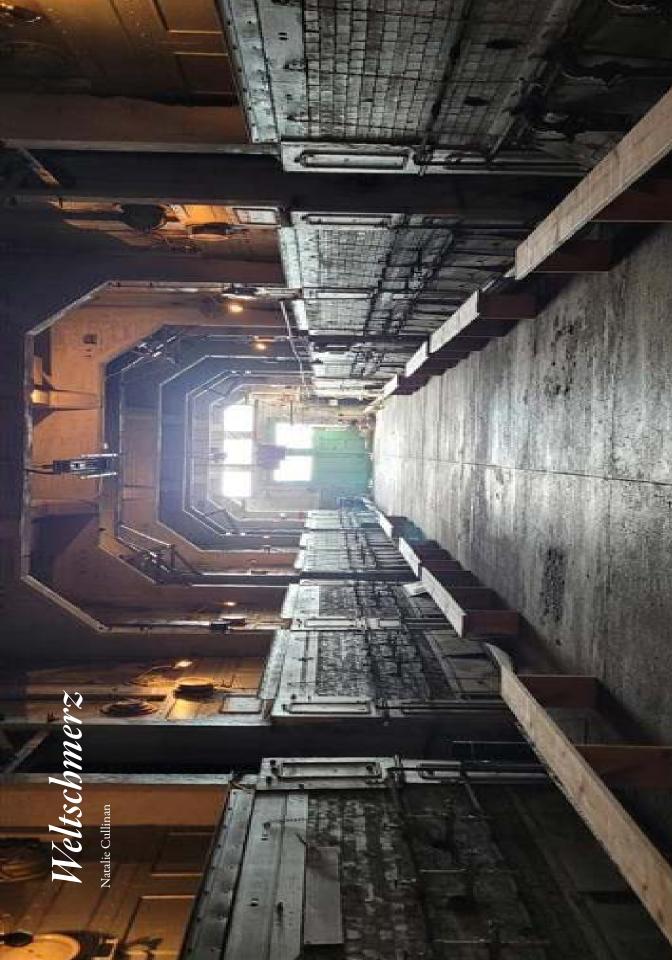
Did you notice me last night
Turnin' over that gaslight
Needin' you to chef solo
But you jus' flake off sayin' 'dunno'?

Roll those eyes, not a sure sight
Dash'a shade 'n honey seasonin' our plight
Can't take it with a grain, but I'll take it as a salt
What we bakin' up today, this elemental gestalt?

Foldin'-in misconceptions, we crack our little talk Deflection, misdirection, 'Frankenstein' can walk Again 'n again, sparkin' garish appetites Catalogin' cataclysmic insights.

I'm takin' all the pain, even assault Goin' mad t'day doin' mental somersaults Over soured dreams, curdled hindsights, Read the recipe – needs some rewrites.





Lazarus

Rachel Riffel

see my friend wrapped in white, saying her goodbyes to the mourners weeping at her feet.

I try to approach her.
But with every step,
my eyes burn.
I fear I cannot control
the flood about
to burst
and overwhelm her worshippers
at the altar of grief.

She is dying.
But I turn from her,
for fear that her fire
and light
will be too bright
for me to touch.

Anne Bodé-Else: Left Behind in the Millennial Reign

Tonya McMillian

ROWING up in a big city, raised by her father, Charles, and mother, Vonnie, with two siblings, her older brother, Christoph, and younger sister, Kammie, did not negate that Anne felt all alone all the time. Her earliest memory was between the ages of three and five. Her parents were fighting in the hall just outside her room. She remembered swinging a belt with the buckle hitting her father about his ankles, shouting, "Daddy, stop!" That was the first of her many memories of hearing, seeing, trying to stop the fighting, and wishing she was anybody else!

The year of our LORD 2030 has come. The allotted and appointed dispensation of one thousand years has begun. The Messiah returns with His Bridal Army, which consisted of those Christians who dedicated their lives to the Word of God, the Bible. World War had begun. Multiple nations collided one against the other. Unity was lost. Division was found. A man from perdition, cunning and unscrupulous, deceiving many into believing that he was the chosen one, but he wasn't The One. He was chosen to destroy and oppose all that is good—all that is God and of God. He is the beast! The three-and-one-half years of total chaos, confusion, illusion, deception, and trickery disguised by talks about "peace and security" had ended.

All that they considered to be humane was stolen. All that they had believed in was a lie; furthermore, they had been deceived for many lifetimes into believing that the world could exist without its Creator. All that they had imagined was granted to them as their reality for a season, for an allotted span of time. All that they held dear, all that they believed to be the truth was shattered with a flash of light that illuminated the sky, dispelling the darkness, both internally and externally. *The Bright and Morning Star* shines on earth once again.

Those that hoped and prayed for redemption in the midst of all the darkness were caught up and removed from the earth. Those that remained considered it a sign of better days to come. An "alien invasion" explained the disappearance of many. They'd prepped, plotted, and planned this subterfuge since the beginning of time, hiding, and conniving reality, turning the truth into a lie and making falsehoods appear as the truth.

Anne Bodé-Else wished she had listened to her mother, her grandmother, Elsie, her pastor, Reverend Beck, and her friends, Cári, Bélla, and Josué, who were now gone. She wished that she had really believed and not just pretended to believe. She wished she would have asked more questions, prayed more often, or even read her Bible more. She wished they were all still here. She wished she had been chosen. She even wished she was dead.

Anne was raised on the south side of Chicago. She witnessed the beatings of her mother by her abusive, alcoholic, angry, and jealous father. Her relationship with Christoph ended due to his drug addiction. She and Kammie had a decade between them and were not close. Anne felt alone. She felt that if there was a God, and if He loved her so much that He sacrificed His Only Begotten Son, why did she suffer so much? If she was loved, how come she did not feel loved?

She dreamt of the day before they all went away. She imagined that she too had accepted and received Christ as her Saviour. She fantasized about being taken with all those whom she loved. She was left alone with her imagination. She was an average student and studied hard. She dreamed and planned for a successful life. A pandemic occurred. The economy suffered more. Prices increased constantly. Food and water were withheld.

Anne thought that all of this was surreal. Everything was happening as the Bible prophesied. She witnessed many things. People were homeless, hungry, thirsty, persecuted, and afflicted. Pestilence and disease flourished. There were frequent earthquakes and volcanic eruptions. The weather was erratic. Tornados, hurricanes, floods, tsunamis, and draughts occurred simultaneously in diverse places. The overuse of prescribed medications replaced herbal remedies which God created to heal the nations. Crime was prevalent. The evidence was clear. It had been in plain sight all along. Why couldn't or didn't she see it before? Why did shet have to endure, suffer, and witness the end of time?

Anne pondered, "now what?" She believed "coincidences do not exist" and "there is a reason for everything that happens." If everything is as it was created to be, then she was left to witness His return. His second coming. She remembered that Reverend Beck preached on the time after the tribulation when Jesus Christ returns with His Bridal Army. She recalls the sermons teaching the defeat of God's foes. She survived all of the tribulation period, and the LORD has returned. She has rejected and denied Him previously, but she has another chance. She has the opportunity to read and study the Word of God, pray and praise Him. She can choose to believe and receive Jesus Christ as her personal Saviour, and she does. She now feels blessed and loved. She experiences a new birth of love in her heart. She was finally at peace

Anne wonders who returned with the LORD. She hopes to see her loved ones again. She longs to show the love that she found so hard to express previously to them, now. She can't imagine seeing her mother again on earth. Then Vonnie appears. She explains to Anne—she has returned with Jesus Christ as His Bride. The former life that her mother

once lived all made sense. Vonnie was a faithful and loyal wife. She was devoted to her family. She endured the hand of Charles. Anne couldn't understand how Vonnie, could stay married to such an evil man. Vonnie only told her that, "I love my family, and you all are very important to me and Jesus." Anne really missed her mother. When Vonnie appeared in her transparent glorified body in Chicago one day, Anne passed out from shock.

When Anne regained consciousness, Vonnie explains to her that because she had completely surrendered her earthly life to live by the example that Jesus had displayed during His first earthly journey, she was granted the position as the Bride of Christ, one of many. She also explains that the "Bride of Christ" is not the same as an earthly bride of an earthly husband. It is an identification and symbol of the unity of her will with the LORD's Will. It was vitally important to Vonnie to be one with Christ for all eternity. Anne was happy and sad. Vonnie reminded Anne of God's grace and mercy. Anne remembers seeing her mother rising before sunrise praying, reading and studying the Bible. She recalls Vonnie's consistent church attendance. Vonnie helped wherever she could. She worked with the church outreach. She helped the homeless. She always sang songs of praise and quoted scriptures. She loved everyone. She cried tears of joy to her LORD.

Anne thought her mother was crazy. She assumed she had been hit so many times that she had completely lost her mind and all sensibility. She could not understand why her mother could continue to live with, cook, clean, and care for her father. When Charles was sick, going blind, could barely walk, and confined to bed most of the time, he still yelled, fussed, cussed, and ridiculed all she did for him. Vonnie never flinched. She smiled. She catered to his every need. She treated him with respect. She told him often, "I love you, Charles" and "I am so grateful to be your wife." She said, "God bless you," when he sneezed, handed him Kleenex,

and prepared herbal remedies. She never flinched, gave him an evil eye, or spoke under her breath to him. She was a beautiful example of God's love every day to Anne, but she did not recognize it at that time.

Vonnie never raised her voice to her children. She always encouraged them. She told them they were wonderful children. She attended every event they participated in. She clapped, waved, and cheered them on. She cared for them just as well as she did Charles in respect of food, clothing, and daily necessities. Anne did not appreciate her mother. She, too, took Vonnie for granted. She would often get upset, irritated, and aggravated with her mother. She was disobedient and disrespectful, particularly around her friends, and she would sometimes talk back to her. Anne quickly realized she was no different than her father towards her mother. She didn't question her mother's love for herself, but she was furious that her mother could offer the same love and affection to a man whom Anne felt did not deserved her mother, when she herself offered the same treatment towards her mother. This realization deeply saddened Anne. "How could I have been so cruel and blind?" She repented for the errors of her choices in life, and she vowed to live by the example that Vonnie and Jesus had left as a witness. It was too late for Anne to be a part of the Bride of Christ, but she can now live on the New Earth after the one thousand years of the Millennial Reign in 3030.

Anne wondered if anyone else she knew also returned. Vonnie was back. She had returned, once again, demonstrate to Anne Bodé-Else and anybody else just how God so loved the world. Anne prayed daily and made a vow to be like Jesus. She read and studied the Bible. She finally learned that it does not matter in this earthly life what is going on around her, it will continue, it will pass, it will be as it is meant to be. She realized that earthen vessels are not perfect vessels—they are all flawed, cracked, bruised, and misused. And they can only be restored or made perfect through the grace and mercy of the LORD Jesus Christ. After all, that

is why He willingly surrendered His life on the cross. There ARE NO coincidences. What does matter is her attitude and demeanor towards the other broken earthen vessels.

During this time all of the creatures that survived the three-and-one-half years of the great and terrible tribulation without denying Christ or agreeing to receive the mark of the beast system are overjoyed that they lived to witness Jesus Christ return. The earth is restored. There is genuine peace, safety, and love felt and shown. All earthen vessels dance, sing, praise, and worship continuously. There are nonstop demonstrations and expressions of gratitude and thanksgiving to the LORD Jesus Christ. The years of dictatorship and tyranny are finally over. The beast has been cast out, chained, and bound in the bottomless pit.

It is surreal for all of those that had rejected the new world regime that the beast had set in place. They are rewarded for their resistance to the governmental rule of the enemies of God. God had provided for and miraculously sustained them during the worst time in all of creation. All of their needs were and are met. The Bride ministers to them day and night without ceasing. They are taught the ways of mercy and grace. They learn many hidden mysterious truths from the Word of God. Their strength has been renewed in the LORD. Their skin shines from the glory that covers the earth since the True Messiah has returned. It appears as if time has stopped. Each moment is more beautiful than the last. For one thousand years, the LORD Jesus Christ reigns in the Holy City with His Bride, ministering love, and there is finally peace on earth and good will toward God's Creation.

This is the best story ever told!

Eurotophobia

Helen Scullin

Y goddess graces heavenly respite
In chambers lined with satin sheets and her.
Allured by beauty basking in moonlight,
We lie together, baring souls that stir.

An angel pleasures spirit and the mind,

Her prayers of union shape what we are.

A hand behests parting what lay enshrined,

Revealing scabbard of the morning star.

Aroused to awaken rose the beast's eye,

With seeping tears that flow past parting lips

Which whisper horrifying, sinful cries:

Demonic yearnings begging between hips.

With love, I brave the beast you cannot see, So you see how divine you are to me.

Looking out the Window of my Dressing Room on my Wedding Day to See a Roman Catholic Funeral Procession

Cole Grennan

And the crow	laboring the point	Amidst the rain there	And the crow cries thrice	tied together by	Some fatherless son drinking, and	dirt cheap dirty and	the crow cries thrice	as the music winds up slow and shrill	as the crow cries in the meadow
w Rattling the bottles on the sill	my mother flutters, arms akimbo	and the Cardinal hits the window	Dreary forlorn fount of want and will	Bridesmaids flit and flutter like minnows	and the Cardinal Some father!	on a car they pulled from the landfill	remakeable, from engine thrum and thrill	this satin skinned day caught in limbo	and the Cardinal hits the window as the crow c
ND the Cardinal hits the window	cries thrice in the meadow	to haunt and thrill	lies the widow Dreary f	in the meadow	Shimmer and shill		remarkable remakea	OW	and the Cardina

Kicked Dog with Rabies

Cole Grennan

OMETIMES I imagine myself a priest. Collared and chained to my master's back door, I wait diligently day in and day out. Sometimes, a stranger will come, staring over the tall gates wrapped in vines. They reach out a hand, offering salvation. Freedom, they whisper, temptation dripping from their cupped hands. They bring with them tools of the damned, ignoring the warnings I spit out. I am not a creation of kindness. I was not born for gentleness. I bite.

I am loyal, and they are not Him. They do not know His peace. His joy. He throws me scraps and cast-off declarations of devotion. "I promise, I promise, I Am the Lord your G-d, and My Word is law." And the law is a heavy hand against my throat. And how I wait every dying day for that gentle pressure. The chains that bite into the thin skin of me when I see Him. Foaming at the mouth in the blistering cold, I ache to close my jaws around His loving hand.

Encounter 1: A Unified Sunday Morning

Tonya McMillian

HE church is full today. It is as if we all are expecting a special visitation from the Holy Spirit in our lives. Everyone is praying, praising, singing, dancing, and rejoicing in the Lord, "Hallelujah!" Ironically, the sermon is titled "The Soon Coming of the Lord." As we all read in unison, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. ...," our bodies begin to transfigure into beings of light. At verse sixteen, we can look through the roof of the church as the Lord descends. We all hear our own names called in His *One* shout. As we continue to read, we see those, who have gone before us in death, rise first. Then, we are changed and snatched away as well. We join the LORD Jesus Christ in the air, and we will remain with Him forever. It is a Sunday morning *Harpázō*.

Encounter 2: An Extraordinary Day at School

Tonya McMillian

EACE Bea Steele attends a Catholic high school. Today in Spanish class, Jeanne, who often reliess on her help. Peace does not shield her paper from her. Spanish comes naturally to Peace. Her teacher once asked if she naturally speaks Spanish. She does not speak it; she is just gifted. They are seated in front of the window. The sun is really bright and hot. The teacher walks over to pull the blinds. She is distracted at the appearance of Peace. Jeanne isstunned and looking at Peace with her mouth open. All the classmates star in disbelief. They can see straight through her and notice her clothing in the chair. Straightaway, Peace is lifted above her seat and transcends through the window. In the blink of an eye, Peace vanishes. She flies across the sky faster than lightning. The teacher and all of the girls look out the window in astonishment. But there is no evidence of what just happened. They question each other if this is the Harpázō.

Encounter 3: An Unexpected Birthday Surprise

Tonya McMillian

ONNIE, Cári, Bélla, and Josué are enjoying Anne's birthday celebration. These four are gathered together in songs of praise and testimonials. They are the outcasts of the party because of their constant demonstrations of worship to the LORD. They normally are, but they find comfort in each other's company at these events. It is a beautiful day in Chicago. The sun is exceptionally bright and shining today. They are remembering the goodness of God in their individual lives. At the same time, they all immediately look up. Their eyes are fixed on the sun. They are smiling and look so peaceful. Their bodies appear as a collection of sparkling particles as if their natural bodies are disintegrating and metamorphosing at the same time. Their clothing lies on the ground beside them. These fragments are reassembled together in the form of translucent light figures. They are instantly snatched up towards the sun. All those at the party stand in amazement. Anne stands in disbelief that the *Harpázō* is real.

Encounter 4: A Spectacular Scenic Drive

Tonya McMillian

ACK and Toya are traveling north through the Cascade mountains in Washington state, taking in the scenery. They have been married for thirty years. They love the Pacific Northwest. They always find it so peaceful and quite heavenly. They love taking outings together. Mack's playlist of worship music invites Toya to sing along. This morning as they drive, the sky is particularly blue and enchanting. Toya always dreams of the LORD's appearance during their drives. She is entranced while gazing at the sun rays. She notices how close the clouds are descending upon them.

"It is so beautiful," she exclaims. Toya is unaware of what is actually happening. Mack pulls to the shoulder and parks.

"Toya" he calls. "Do you hear that?"

She does not hear it. She is being lulled into a trance by the billowy clouds. Suddenly, she hears the loud horn.

Mack shouts, "Now, can you hear the shofar blowing?"

She stutters in disbelief, initially, "W-w-what, is that the sound of the trumpet?"

They do not have time to react differently. Their bodies begin to transfigure. They lose their natural form. As this change occurs, they are lifted up and out of the car through the roof. Their clothing is still in the car. Once they are above the car, their transparent forms are completed. They soar faster than the speed of light towards the sun rays that envelop them. This day started just like any other morning, but it ends with the $Harp\acute{a}z\~{o}$.

Encounter 5: An Unusual Workday

Tonya McMillian

ANIELLE wakes up extra early today, extremely excited to go to work. She is not quite sure why, but her spirit is expecting something good to happen. It is as if she is finally going to get that promotion she has been praying about. She could really use some good news today. Life can be challenging at times, but she knows deep within her being that her God is Faithful. He never fails. He is right on time. He is not a man that He should lie. His Word is True. And His Promises are always performed. These are statements she often reaffirms to herself throughout the day. As soon as she approaches the building, the reflection of the sun against the glass exterior walls blinds her so much that she turns away from them. She hears the shofar trumpet blow. "Wow! This is the most beautiful day ever!" She falls to her knees. She raises her hands towards the heavens. She surrenders her life by saying, "All mine is thine, LORD!" She feels a tingling, almost tickling, sensation all over her body. Her clothes drop to the ground instantly, and she is not ashamed, nor is her nakedness revealed. She feels as if tears are flowing, not just from her eyes, but out of every pore. She is being washed in the Love of the LORD. She hears the LORD shout her name. She responds, "Yes, LORD!" She sees lights soaring up to the heavens, as if from out of the ground and all around as far as her eyes can capture. All at once, she is lifted up and flying at jet speed towards the LORD who waits with His arms outstretched to receive His children. She receives the greatest of all promotions by being in the *Harpázō*.

A Grief Obscured

Cole Grennan

Y mother stopped loving me two days after her fifty-fifth birthday. Like any other Tuesday, she got home late. The dark sky stood on a precipice. Clouds covered the Sturgeon moon and all her friendly stars. Sweaty and tired from the Zumba class she taught, my mother put together a meal that we should have eaten in stilted, awkward silence. It was routine. An ordinary moment.

With the lights dimmed, the patterns of the floorboards faded to shadow, I waited at the microwave. What stilted silence would I have preferred, broken by accusation. Broken by fear. The words she threw like blades pinned me to the cabinets before dissolving into pretty black smoke while I laughed. 'Why are you lying?' She asked. 'Why are you living a lie?'

Lies are safe. Like a child hiding under blankets from the boogeyman, no one can hurt me if they cannot see me. I see those shadowed hands dancing along the edges, but still, I am safe. To be known is to be judged, and what a cruel jury are the righteous.

But oh, God, tenderly, tenderly.

At the beginning of September, a few weeks after this forced confession, we were back in the kitchen. It was brightly lit, the sun a rare guest

before the gray of Autumn would arrive in absolute. Eating almonds salted with my tears, I answered my mother's question, 'what do you want from me?'

What do I want.

I want to wrap myself in lies, to shove myself into a box in which I never could fit, spilling out from the edges as I bury my face in tear-soaked cardboard. I want to run until my feet break against unknown asphalt, where friends wear the faces of strangers, and I can make myself anew. I want to scream at the injustice until God steps down from His mighty throne, his craftsman hands weathered and shaking as he holds my face and apologizes.

I want a mother who loves me.

She cries, sweet tears that I don't allow myself to see. The swirling floorboards stand stark beneath my boots. I finish my almonds. What an ordinary moment.

A Right Jerusalem Blade.

To be purified by fire is the call of the righteous. 'I will refine them like silver,' God says, 'and test them like gold.' What riches are these, to have been cast and molded as their creator saw fit? Molten silver, shaped and sharpened, predestined to fit into the hole in my chest.

I wonder what it would be like to be loved unconditionally. 'I love you despite your flaws,' she says, as if she's doing me a favor. As if I should be thanking her. 'I love you despite the ways you've failed me.' And what a failure I am. A sinner, a dyke, a blasphemous stain on a family tree of heathens.

When she looks at me, I see the reflection of brimstone in her eyes. Burning blue and pure, those lakes of fire have never looked more welcoming. With Hellfire licking at my heels, I find I can't believe in the God I love. I can't believe in my mother either.

Oh God, God, why did you take such trouble to force this creature out of its shell if it is now doomed to crawl back—to be sucked back—into it?

The truth of my existence hurts. Saying it felt like being ripped from the safety of a... well. A mother's arms. Weeks removed, hours, I walk along cracked asphalt to the home of my God and find I cannot breathe. On trembling feet and aching knees, I climb the hill to meet my fate. What love is this, to be called 'beloved.' What love is this, to be turned away.

The eyes follow me, as I walk down the well-lit hall of our church. A friend smiles, teeth sharp in the fluorescence, and talks of sacrifice. A story heard, a man who fell prey to the sin of the flesh, then baulked. 'Take heart,' they whisper, 'you, too, could be among the righteous.'

Oh, to be outside my hollow of lies. To see the heart I excised in order to stay hidden, to not be given away by its traitorous beating. I can't do it again. My full being stands tall in the sun, and I find I can no longer hold a scalpel. Even for my loving God. Even for my mother.

They say, "The coward dies many times'; so does the beloved.

Didn't the eagle find a fresh liver to tear in Prometheus every time it dined?

The church breathes like a liminal space. With its ice-white light and forest-green carpet, it's waiting. You can feel it in the air, the dust mites

that land heavy on your tongue. It's always waiting, breath bated in frozen air.

Breathe in.

I stand like a deer on the cracked asphalt, staring down my blinding predator.

Breathe out.

How else am I to face it?

Breathe in.

I could turn, run back into the safety of the brush and pretend I never looked into its bright, glaring eyes, but I am forever changed.

Breathe out.

I know the fear of deafening growls and blinding silence and I know that fear will follow me.

Breathe in.

How should I rid myself of it, other than to swallow it whole.

Breathe out.

Would it not give chase?

Breathe in.

Am I not tied to this place of miraculous hurt?

Sometimes it is hard not to say, 'God forgive God.'

Sometimes it is hard to say so much.

But if our faith is true, He didn't. He crucified Him.

And, now I know why we created religion. Not for a need to understand life or death, but because we each need a mother. Even mothers. The point of Christianity is that we have a mother who will forgive us, and yet, He wouldn't forgive Himself, His own Son, who are, of course, exactly the same. So how, I ask in fervent prayer, are we meant to forgive ourselves?

How are we meant to forgive our mothers?

Devotion

Lesly Portugal



keep you like a most treasured secret,

closely, obsessively

and just for myself.

furtive, stolen touches

softly linger upon my skin

as an unspoken love letter

traced upon my body

with ink that only I can read.

illicit conversations wrap around my mind

like stolen silk,

it's a blanket of beautiful and delicately subdued voices

a blanket of comfort against

the scrutiny of society.

They call me faithless

but alone with you I indulge in acts

of the purest, yet surreptitious worship,

practiced illicitly because

to admit you is

to give you up.

Your name is a whisper upon my lips and fire in my throat.

Whilst I want to shout you out for the world to hear you can only remain stuck inside my esophagus, such a sweet taste that I cannot speak about.





Silver Sunset

Sam Atwood

HE stories I tell myself are reflected in your eyes How beautiful, that after millennia of resting on walls of cool dry caves In throats, in loins, in that rare moment where neurons fire just right we shaped you a story made manifest. Some days, I can't help but echo you Most, though, I can't hear your reply In truth, you were carved out, are sculpted into perfection uplifted, or maybe just uncovered What would you be if we hadn't made you? How, like the gods of old, hasn't one of us just eaten the other already?

Because that's the story, isn't it?

Consumption.

How you were made, are sustained

My sacred thorn, my desert apple

You're the pomegranate tree of ten generations

The canyons sculpted by the sun's rough hands

I long to feel your drunken exhalations

Your broad palms and pointed tongue

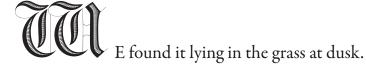
Each step everlasting

Each heartbeat jolting a haunted neon sky

Te amo, ángel mío.

This Field of Nowhere

Erin Moine



Peculiar wouldn't cut it—

this object of glossy, pale blue.

My sister called it a Portuguese Man o' War,

a Physalia physalis, like the old-fashioned Jell-O cake our grandmother made.

Why would such a creature be here,

in this field of nowhere and nothing?

My sister reaches to touch it,

and I slap her hand away.

She berates me for it,

but I don't want her to get stung.

I poke it gently

with a rotting stick coated in cow manure.

This squishy, blue, and soft creature

exhales a whiny sigh.

My sister removes her jacket,

wrapping it tenderly around the creature.

"We should take it to the Fish and Wildlife office in town."

I tell her they won't believe us.

My sister's jacket begins to glow blue.

A memory, a snap, and then—

I am sitting in the grass at dawn.

The creature that is not a Portuguese Man o' War

lies in a test tube

in upstate New York.

The world awarded it a thousand articles —

this Fae, this being from elsewhere.

It is present day.

I am alone in this field of nothing,

and my sister is dead.

Wait, I Said/No, They Said

Sam Atwood



lay here in post-existential bliss

wait, no What's the other one?

coital

Legs twined together Trickster, they said I didn't catch a name

Eyes like a star at its zenith

Each kiss like a knife across my skin

caught up in the inexorable tide of being

(I was a little drunk, okay?)

They promised a night of pleasure

wait, no
What's the other one?

life

Scott-Free

Christian Bauer

OT to throw some Brontë at you, but 'little things recall us to earth' (that's Jane Eyre). Do you ever fall into yourself when you're trying to get to sleep? What's that called? It's kind of like being called back to reality. So, I'll call it that. Recall. It's an odd sensation—like goosebumps on the breeze of absolute zero.

It'll stop you in your tracks.

So, I'm back, unpaused, into the slipstream of time. The wind recalls in tow, catching the

chime dulcet of midsummer, like a soundtrack on repeat. When I look up, nothing's there.

"Hello?" I muster, looking up again. Nothing's there. So, I stray from the living room

into the foyer with my newfound gumption, yelling loudly at the base of the stairs, "Scott!"

What's going on?

Okay, hear me out on this one. Every time I look up— nothing's there. But these stairs do, and always have, led somewhere. And I don't recall Scott down here. So, he must be— attached to nothing? That can't be right.

Naturally, I haul ass—right up those ordinary stairs just as I have a million other times.

We started building in, what, 2020? Yeah, that sounds right. And much to my surprise, there it

was. Not nothing.

"Scott?"

"Sexy man!" he shouts from the guest bedroom.

"What year did we move in?"

"If I recall correctly, 2019-2020? Sometime 'round there," Scott haggled with his

Fingers. "Yeah, no, 2020."

Shortly after getting married, we bought our plot and built our dream house. We'd been

dating, flirting with the concept, but hadn't made it to it. Then, of course, you know, the whole

pandemic thing. And honestly, I just couldn't take living in that cramped apartment another

second. So, we invested in our dream house—no— home.

Two stories. Four bedrooms, no basement. Three and a half baths. A guest room. Our future spawn room doubles as a second office—the works. Moreover, the house has everything we could ever want. But every time I look up—still, nothing.

"Ugh, groble!" Scott's eyebrow cocked, "did you need something?"

"Nothing," I declare and look up. "What do you see?"

"Not this 'what's up, dog' thing again."

"C'mon, I'm serious. What do you see?"

"A ceiling. A roof. A mortgage. The life we're trying to build," Scott said, not looking up.

"It's not like the money tree's up and running."

"Har, Har – seriously, look up. I insist. And, like, what're you doing up here? Did you

hear me calling?"

"I'm making up the pull-down bed. Grace—YOUR SISTER— is coming to stay for a bit.

Remember! She told you all about it," Scott said, taking a nervous breath. "Remember, her and

Jake— I never really liked that guy to begin with."

"That's right," I reply.

"You doing ok?"

"Yeah, I mean, I think so. Will you please look up and tell me what you see?"

"Nothing."

"See, see! I love ya, but what did I tell ya?" I mutter, vindicated. "Did you hear me calling you from downstairs?"

"Nope," Scott said, sprawled diagonally across the bed, pulling the last of the fitted sheet around the far-right corner, "but could you please just help me a sec?"

Yet, before I could even respond—goosebumps. The heat vanished from the room. The

metal springs of the Murphy bed began to wail like metallic whales beneath the ice sheets.

Before I could respond, the guest bed jarringly contracted upright, slamming Scott against the

wall. I scream, running in circles like I have spontaneously combusted.

From what I recall, it was only a second. With a snap, the bed collapsed almost as quickly as it had vised shut. Yet, not without consequence. Scott's blood begins to pool around the debris. I run to him.

That's not nothing, I insist to myself— the Grim Reaper pushing past me. Oddly, despite

the grim veil, I think they shot me a look? Those eyes, those damn eyes, kill us every time. "You're not welcome here!" I yell.

*

Recall. Only this time, I keep falling and falling back to my reality through the endless-twisting-corridors-of-void like I'd never left. Load game? I lip the file save options back to myself. It's been hours.

"Nah, I'm not ready for that kind of commitment just yet."

The chime-like interlude— I'm visibly shook—of The Sims whispers lullabies at 4 AM.

Maybe tomorrow.

1993

Christian Bauer

-BETA access providers flout alt-country atmospheric rivers with no back button, only the blue screen of death. Meanwhile, bootleg body cameras snap after-hour booty calls. A click through the commentariat, cosplaying cybersurfers, Cyclospora, dead tree deep cuts with endless desire lines of the Digital Nomad hoarding dissociative identity disorder [DID] on DVD.

We're a dwarf planet, pushed by e-commercing fashionistas hopped up on fen-phen. A game changer. What with gender confirmation surgery, gender-fluids, Generation Z, and popping haliers into jukebox musicals roaring, "Jumada al-Awaal," spring keyloggers disputing macaron or macaroon, unconcerned with the latest microdermabrasion. Quaggy couch potatoes horking down karmic neonicotinoid, rewilding robocalls to safe third-country agreements offshore.

Infomercials roll "Santoku – the universal resource locator of soul," led by V-chip, parental-blocking, TV-athon static, eyes landing, late-night, on webmasters (and webmistresses) that curate-a-life dot website, & Free Wet Willy -- Moonwalking to the Zig-Zag algorithm chanting: "Peta, Exa, Zettabyte!"

What world is born into me?





Not Haunting but Haunted

Emily McNealy

OOKING glass it is not,
For that is not me
A ghost the reflection has brought,
Though my eyes may deceive

Gaunt bones stand in my stead,
His mouth open in pain
A wound agape on his head,
His face is blood red, a stain

His brows move with agony,

And orbs wide in anger,

Proof of our shared tragedy,

A death bell, its clangor

It's not me in the mirror,

But I know the spirit still

His face can't be clearer,

The man, by my hand, a life spilled

"Soft Spoken"

Noel Nephew

UST because I feel no need to fill a quiet moment with noise does not mean I have nothing to say. I'm gathering. Collecting moments others might not notice. Content to just observe and let the world show itself to me. Then I can begin my weave. Pick and stitch and create worlds all my own. There my voice is the loudest.

Blood to Dust

Emily McNealy

IFE poured unto me from Her golden cup,
And my body grew from a speck
Then I wailed as the world opened up,
Umbilical cord wrapped around my neck

Quickly soon my old lips are dried; An almost corpse of weakened air Flickers of recognition have died Empty eyes, wide, my stare

"Goddess Gaze"

Johanna Deletti Elysia | Harman Projects



OU could not know my journey through jaded dreams under my Goddess Gaze.

Seaweed green mirrored against layers of a metallic stream occupied by incandescent tumult.

Flaming red ringlets amongst writhing serpentine like a creature who coils like my tail molts into submission.

Surrounded by lava-soaked fire ripplets, panic waits for my sacred fins to slay repressed impatience.

Indigo flowerets blossom in the efflorescence of ombré petals tied to lore and vermillion-soaked rope flaming in despair.

"Don't tell me I can't have the earth's oceans and don't tell me I can't have fins to swim."

The pace of breath forgotten where these lungs expand, lost in the silk black onyx where petals emerge from the sand.

They bloom in the ruins of volcanic ash and past doom.

My Goddess gaze mirrors pearlescent reflections of the maddening sea as my air turns mineral blue under my Cancer Moon. My plea with Joy for my authentic form turns my reflection into metallic imprints of steel-stained curves of a weed; slacking gaze to knees, I plead.

Joy glides across my chest and pounds on my breast cage like she has never been there before.

My slithering scales begin to rattle into full form, melding my legs together and lifting my flippers from the floor.

My flippant fins rage in the cerulean sea waves of June and Joy, she whispers into the arch of my collarbone, she falls right in, as I swim.

Mercurial Garden at Dusk

Erin Moine

ILLOWY wisps of sapphire blue.
A cool breeze lifts a drooping fern,
then slams it back to the dewy grass,
droplets stinging your eyes.

Vivid shimmers of cerulean, scarlet, gold, and lilac.

A bone-thin banshee squeals her sorrow through a ragged, raw throat among the dead Doll's Eye plants.

Sharp golden rose buds among a puddle of ink, sticky against your fingertips.

A reaper swathed in tatters saunters through joyous stinging nettle.

The will-o'-the-wisp sighs out her lungs.
The banshee cries stinging, acid tears.
And the reaper slips in the gluey ink, falling toward the rotten soil.

"Apparition"

Rachel Rifell

AST night I had a dream that you appeared in front of me and I wept.

We embraced and I could smell our faded years of friendship on your shoulder.

I didn't know what to say except for Where have you been?

a
You towered over me

like the Redwoods on that starry night when we were young and camping.

When we thought the future was aligned and understood.

But that was merely a figment, an apparition of truth.

When I awoke, I felt the absence of a friend who knew me.

₹ 70 ¥





Still Water

Erin Moine

RNICA startled with a sharp intake of breath as the angry starling swooped past her head. The skin of her right cheek tingled as the bird's feathers brushed it. She grunted in irritation as the starling, perched in a nearby tree, screeched at her. "Go build your nest somewhere else," she hollered back.

Her ears still rang from the library's quiet study room. Her eyes strained in the overcast, yet bright weather. Focusing on the same chapters of the state's abandoned sites had her head swimming with more questions than when she began studying.

Straightening her backpack full of library books, Arnica continued along the narrow trail that locals had made through the tall field grass. The short way home from the library meant cutting through the field that was never mowed, owned by a strict conservationist.

A soft breeze ruffled her straw-colored hair, making the tall grass around her sing. A quick glance at the sky with its steel-gray clouds had Arnica walking faster. Despite the May afternoon, Arnica shivered. The temperature dropped increasingly with the oncoming storm. Evidently jeans, boots, and a t-shirt layered with a sweatshirt weren't enough for spring's temperamental weather.

After about ten minutes of walking, a flash and a low rumble of thunder made Arnica's skin prickle. The storm was too close. She glanced around for possible choices of shelter, her only options proving to be an outhouse looking to fall in on itself, or a lone brick house across

a manicured lawn. Crucifixes lined the entire property of the house—no, thanks.

Arnica followed the trail a bit further, a large structure suddenly catching her eye. The Dog Rose Research Center stood solitary in the only mowed clearing of the field, its only companions a few trees and the crucifix house in the distance. Arnica had never really paid attention to it before the college semester's final research project, yet today her eyes landed on it. A strange feeling washed over her. Years of simple, passive interest morphed into undeniable curiosity.

Abandoned twenty years earlier, due to undisclosed circumstances, the scientific research center had once been a thriving place for scientists and local researchers on a variety of topics. Her recent research at the library produced only hints as to why it shut down. Curiosity and the need to find the truth made her heart quicken.

Another clap of thunder had Arnica hurrying toward the research center. It was either that or the crucifix house, and Arnica would rather be struck by lightning than be forced to knock on the door of that house and ask for shelter.

The worn brick and dirty broken windows of the asylum gave Arnica only momentary pause. She jogged along the front, passing by the barricaded front doors as she searched for a broken window on the lower levels where she could crawl in. The shadows within the building seemed to hum and pulse as the wind fanned the grass surrounding the structure.

Finally, Arnica found a window with only a bit of glass remaining. She pulled a small flashlight out of her backpack, clicking it on. The drop to the floor was manageable. She tossed her backpack in first, then placed the flashlight between her teeth as she carefully maneuvered inside. A quick glance at the broken remains of the glass had tetanus written all over it.

Arnica lowered herself to the ground, gathering up her backpack.

The stillness within the room was palpable, years of untold stories laid out in front of her. She'd crawled into some sort of administrative office or meeting room, with red cloth-and-metal chairs scattered about. The walls were decorated with peeling paint and traces of black mold. The scent that hit Arnica's nostrils reminded her of dirt, metal, and something else she couldn't place.

The intense curiosity pulled her deeper into the room. During her research, she'd wondered why the place had been abandoned; the center had only appeared in the local newspaper once with the vaguest, shortest article she'd ever seen. The reason for closure was attributed to financial reasons, yet somehow it didn't make sense, as the organization was funded by local nonprofits and nearby community colleges.

Arnica found a set of metal stairs leading up, carefully taking them in case they were unstable. The stairs led her to a large hallway with several rooms lining each side. She slowly made her way along, shining her flashlight into each room. Most of them appeared to be offices with old computers, filing cabinets, and file folders with papers strewn about. One office still contained remnants of what looked like an unfinished muffin, now shriveled and teeming with rot.

A furrow formed between Arnica's brows. Why was all of this stuff just left here? They couldn't even take the time to dispose of unfinished food? Arnica's mind swirled as she tried to put the pieces together. If the business was shut down properly, all of this should have been cleared out. Yet, remnants of the past sat untouched and neglected.

A small shuffling sound made Arnica's muscles tense, her flashlight landing on a small mouse perched on one of the desks. It twitched its nose and blinked its inky black eyes at her. Arnwica relaxed a bit, though her heart still pounded in her chest. She continued on down the hall, following the ever-present tug of an invisible string and the determination to discover the truth about this place.

Her feet carried her down another hall, peeling paint revealing

rotting boards and rusted materials underneath. Rooms lining the hall-way held rotting beds, strange symbols carved into some of the walls. One room held the words *They are here* written in old brown paint—or, perhaps, it was blood.

Arnica hurried on, passing rooms containing old medication bottles and even blood bags, until she reached a staircase leading down. Before she could second guess herself, Arnica followed the steps, her feet moving faster the further she went.

She was so focused on what she'd seen in the offices and medical rooms that she only now registered the silence. Arnica couldn't even hear the storm outside. Goosebumps traveled up her spine. In her distraction, Arnica's foot caught a slippery step.

Arnica flailed her arms, narrowly catching the railing and almost dropping her flashlight. She adjusted her beam to shine in front of her, and her heart nearly leapt from her chest. A massive expanse of still water blocked her path. The sole of her right boot sat submerged in the murky brown and red liquid. A closer glance revealed tiny, wiggling creatures near the surface. Lectures about brain-eating amoeba in various science classes had her scrambling backwards, shaking her foot to try and rid her shoe of water.

Arnica turned and hurried back up the stairs, vaguely wondering how the water got there. She retraced her path through the building, passing the rooms, which now appeared different—cleaner, yet still full of decay. Where a burning sense of curiosity had gripped her before, now a sense of dread and the need to get out had her breaking into a run.

She passed the offices, her flashlight beam hitting the room with the mouse, which now lay on the desk in a contorted and unnatural position, even for a dead thing. Arnica hurried toward her escape window, ignoring the fact that the red chairs in the meeting room were now stacked neatly against the wall and sported dark stains. She hoisted herself up through the broken window, clicking her flashlight off with trembling hands as she straightened on the gravel outside. At once, her nose registered a myriad of smells: lilac, metal, grass, and decay. Arnica glanced around, the stillness and silence around her doing nothing to calm her still-racing heart. The still, gray skies showed no sign of the previous storm.

Running a hand over her face, Arnica took a breath and began walking back around the building. The feeling that something had gone terribly wrong at the research center, and, for some reason, no one would talk about it, sat in her mind like a persistent fungus.

Rounding the corner of the building, Arnica halted. Confusion and fear gripped her so suddenly that her heart palpitated.

The crucifix house was gone.

The grass surrounding her had taken on a gray hue, strange movements coming from the thicker parts. Arnica's eyes went to a willowy figure standing where the crucifix house should have been. It was tall, with alabaster skin and long, spindly fingers. Its bald head sported warts covered in mucormycosis. Arnica thought she spotted a ball-point pen sticking out of one of the warts. The creature slowly turned to look at her, its eyes an inky black that reminded her of the mouse's eyes.

The creature's mouth stretched into a sharp, red-stained grin, exposing two rows of metallic teeth that resembled the blades of X-Acto knives. It made a sound like a wet, gurgling groan and took one step forward. Its long fingers dragged on the ground.

You don't belong here, the words sounded loud in Arnica's head, sending her body immediately into fight-or-flight mode. Instead of turning and running, though, she slowly backed away from the creature. Running from it would only induce its prey drive. Movement in the grass caught her attention, and a quick glimpse revealed thin black worms dancing over the steel grass like shiny shoelaces.

Arnica continued backwards, forcing herself not to panic. An-

other step, and her back bumped into something solid. A startled scream lurched from her throat, and she spun around, wielding her flashlight like a hatchet.

A firm hand blocked her assault, and she glanced up into a pair of winter-green eyes, framed by a dark cowl. Sharp cheekbones and a firm jaw, complimented by neatly styled hair the color of crows, greeted her. "You don't belong here," he said, a small smirk tugging at the corner of his lips. His appearance was such a contrast to that of the spindly creature that her mind reeled. A dark cloak that moved like shadows completed his ensemble.

"What happened? What is this place?" Arnica asked, finally finding her voice. It trembled slightly, and shame at her fear rolled through her. She pulled her arm roughly from his grasp. "And who are you?" Arnica took a step back, positioning her body so that she could keep an eye on the creature behind her, now only a few yards away. Its height reached nearly seven feet.

The man gave the creature a single look, and it halted its slow trek toward them. "That information is not important. What matters is that *you* do not belong *here*, and you must leave."

"Leave, how? Go back through there?" Arnica gestured toward the research center. This had to be some sort of fever dream—perhaps she'd fallen asleep when she first crawled inside the building.

"I can send you back to your world, but you must never attempt to return here," the man explained. "This world is not made for your kind."

"My kind?" Arnica found the decency to be a bit offended.

"Humans, I mean," he quickly corrected himself. "Humans were never meant to find this place, never meant to come here to try to... study us."

His use of the word *try* made her shudder. "That's what happened to the research center, then? We discovered this place, and you made us

shut it down?" The feeling of relief hit Arnica at this truth.

"Like I said, our realm is not for humans," the man replied. "It never has been, and it never will be."

Before Arnica could ask any further questions, the man placed a cold palm upon her forehead. "Now, go home." The world lurched, turning a blinding white. Arnica blinked and awoke—

—in the study hall of the library.

Midnight skies shone through the dusty windows.

An American Werewolf

Stella Ramos



I write to you today to address your problematic portrayal of were-wolves in cinema. Now, I can understand that, without meeting one, the concept of a werewolf might seem particularly novel. But the idea that someone could lose control and become an animal right before your very eyes isn't true. Truth be told, real werewolves are far closer to humans than they are to the common depiction of savage beasts. Let me go through some of the most ridiculous myths.

First off, the whole dramatic moon transformation thing? Completely fabricated. We don't need the moon to shift! We don't even really care about the moon, and shifting's not painful; it's natural. You also can't be turned with a bite; it's not a disease, you can't catch "werewolf". Also, silver? Nothing but hearsay. A bullet would kill anyone silver or not, it's almost as laughable as using garlic against a vampire. Oh yeah, and there's no loss of control when we shift. It's a – say it with me – natural process! Think about it, if we were really all running around out of our minds once a month then why aren't monster flicks listed under "Documentaries"?

So, then what is the truth? Well, the truth is you probably walk past werewolves all the time without knowing it. We don't have built-in six packs and we still wear jackets when it's cold. Some of us might be on

the hairier side, but your first thought wouldn't be "werewolf", it'd be "European." We're plenty active, as I'm sure you can imagine, and family-oriented. And notice how I didn't say worker bees mindlessly controlled by a queen. I hope it goes without saying, but even plain wolves don't have alphas. Maybe you think it's hard to keep our appetites in check. Bzzzzt! Think again. Remember, we aren't regular wolves. We can eat the same things humans do, and between blood and chocolate I'd pick chocolate any day!

Now, I don't really think this letter is going to spark some new movie trend, but I do hope it's changed your point of view. I hope that you begin to walk through your life taking a good look around you and wondering who could be a werewolf. Is it the guy with long hair? Or the girl who wears moonstone jewelry? If we don't look different and we don't act different then how will you know where we are? You won't know, and I hope the question drives you crazy.

Yours Truly, An American Werewolf

Wendigo

Erin Moine

HE sky wept metallic rain on the day Josie encountered the lump in the road. It simply hunched there; a brown, furry lump soaked by the rainwater. She slammed on the brakes of her old Chevy.

The truck screeched as it struggled to a halt in the mud. The low evening light made the soaked lump resemble a boulder in the middle of the muddy road. *Probably just a deer, or a dead bear*, Josie thought. Her muscles stiffened. *What could have killed a bear?*

Pulling up her hood, Josie muttered a curse and shoved open the door of the truck. The lump sat in the middle of the road, its form rivaling the size of her truck. As she neared it, the mange of its fur became more noticeable.

Goosebumps crawled over her arms and along her spine as Josie slowly approached the lump. She moved carefully toward the object, the balls of her feet treading carefully in the slippery mud.

Her eyes flicked over the object, watching for movement. It wasn't breathing. Josie's stomach crawled, her palms turning clammy.

Annoyance soon replaced the sense of unease. The only way to get around the lump meant driving into the deep mud, at the risk of the old truck becoming stuck...directly beside the lump.

Josie pulled out her phone, hunching over it to shield it from the rain. She dialed a number, her fingers stiff from the cold. After two rings, Daryl answered. "What?"

Always so cheerful, Josie thought at the sound of her ex-husband's greeting. "Yeah, hi. So, there's this thing in the road, and I'm going to be late, because it's right in the middle of the damn road," Josie replied louder than necessary.

"Well, go around it."

"I'll get stuck in the mud if I do that." Josie sighed in frustration. "Can you just tell Mabel I'll be late. You know how much she hates phones...and poor punctuality." Mabel wouldn't even own a landline.

"Yeah, sure. Just don't get stuck," Daryl replied. Josie could *hear* the smirk in his voice.

Jerk. Josie hung up and reassessed the lump.

Only now, the lump faced her. Josie's heart pounded as she stared, frozen, at the massive bone-white deer skull attached to the large body of a bull elk. Something moved along the creature's face.

Josie's brow furrowed as a butterfly with wings of sapphire shyly peeked out from the animal's eye socket. The butterfly fluttered its wings, drifting in the deluge to land on Josie's nose. She glimpsed her reflection in its inky eyes. A strange calm overcame her. Everything would be all right. She would ask the animal for a ride to Daryl and Mabel's, so her truck wouldn't get stuck. Maybe the animal would gift her a butterfly of her own in reward for asking a favor of it.

The confusing train of thoughts made Josie blink, her vision encompassed by the butterfly's eyes. *Wait, that doesn't make any sense.* Not a moment after her mind caught up to her, a sharp pain traveled along the bridge of her nose and into her forehead.

She yelped and slapped her face, frantically trying to dislodge the butterfly. It fluttered back to the animal, disappearing into its eye socket. Josie felt her nose, the stinging sensation nearly blinding her. Her fingers came away red.

Heart pounding, she raced back to her truck, slamming the door behind her. She grabbed some old coffee-shop napkins from the center console and pressed them against her nose as she shifted the truck into reverse, and back to drive. She floored the gas pedal, swerving dangerously around the creature, which sprouted greenery along its side and back. She kept her foot on the gas pedal until she pulled into Daryl and Mabel's driveway, her hands still shaking.

"What the hell happened to your face?" Mabel greeted her as Josie hurried through the door and into the bathroom, searching for rubbing alcohol and a Band-Aid. "What a way to greet your great-niece," Daryl said from the living room.

"I'm fine," Josie said, a bit shortly. Why hadn't she simply found a motel? Sudden memories of the accident a month ago accompanied the self-reflection.

"Well, fine then." Mabel huffed, her silver hair standing in stark contrast to her pink nightgown. "I'll put on some tea." She disappeared into the kitchen.

After doctoring her nose, Josie shrugged off her wet clothes and pulled on a pair of sweatpants and a long-sleeved cotton shirt. She headed into the kitchen, lowering herself into one of the creaky dining room chairs. Mabel poured hot water over tea bags that smelled of rotting dirt.

Daryl sat beside Josie, and the pink scar running the length of his handsome face twisted and writhed. "What happened?" Concern pulled at the corners of his eyes.

Josie thought for a moment how to explain her observations. Finally, after a strange look from Mabel, she told it outright. Both Daryl and Mabel's faces were blank by the time she finished her story.

Daryl picked at a piece of wood on the table. Mabel brought them their tea. Josie glanced into her cup and blinked at what might have been a fuzzy moth, swimming around in the hot liquid. She blinked, and it disappeared.

"You didn't see anything," Mabel said, sipping her tea.

"I know what I saw," Josie protested. The stench of the tea assaulted her nostrils, burning the delicate hairs.

"I'd listen to Mabel if I were you," Daryl said quietly.

"Don't act like I've done something wrong," Josie snapped. Daryl's look of concern morphed into a glare. "Oh, now *I'm* crazy because I witnessed a dead deer birth a fucking butterfly out of its eye—which bit my nose!"

"Keep your voice down, Josephine," Mabel commanded, her voice nearly a whisper. "We're trying to help you." Mabel's tone had transitioned to pitying.

Despite her ire, a wave of fatigue overcame Josie. Her head

pounded, and her nose throbbed from her wound. "Fine, I'm sorry. Whatever." She sighed and took a sip of her tea. She nearly choked on it, spitting it back into the cup. "What is this shit?" she shouted.

"It's tea, what else?" Mabel said, finishing her cup. Daryl nonchalantly took a drink of his own. Neither of their faces wrinkled with disgust.

"I'm going to bed. We'll talk in the morning," Josie said. Her head swam from the conversation.

Mabel and Daryl remained silent as Josie left the room.

Later that night, Josie awoke in a cold sweat. Her eyes could pick out each granule of wood in the wall and grain in the floor. She smelled dust in the vents. Josie rubbed her eyes and trudged through the house toward the kitchen. A knock sounded from the hall.

Her body fully alert, she snatched the old pistol from Mabel's spice cabinet. She slowly approached the door, the knocking still present.

Opening the door a crack, she glanced out. Silence and still night air greeted her as Josie clicked off the safety and opened the door wider, stepping outside. She glanced around, rolling her feet carefully so that she made no sound on the soft grass.

She glanced around the front yard, only her truck and Daryl's car in the driveway. Josie turned to go back inside when a shriek sounded from the woods across the large front lawn. The shriek sounded again, and Josie recognized her name within the sound.

She wheeled around to run back inside and make Daryl and Mabel explain what the hell was going on.

Josie yelped as she came face-to-face with a bone-white deer skull mounted on a large, mangy body. The creature from earlier stood not five feet from her, blocking her way to the front door. The depthless black eye sockets stared into hers, a familiar blue butterfly drifting past her head to land on the creature's horns.

An intense, nauseating fear gripped Josie. All the hair on her body stood on end, and her heart pounded so hard she wasn't sure her breathing could keep up. The creature cocked its head and hissed something. Josie snarled back at it and aimed her weapon. She supposed

telling it to move wouldn't do much. So, she pulled the trigger.

The monster stood firm. The bullet tore into its hide and made it step back a little, but then it righted itself, shaking its body in a sickly, deer-like way. The butterfly on its horns fluttered its wings in annoyance. Josie spotted something crawling from the bullet hole in the monster's chest. A long, green stem, decorated with elegant leaves, sprouted from the hole. New life, born from the violence.

The front door flew open, and Daryl stood there, his blue eyes locking on hers. "What the hell are you doing?"

"Trying to get back into the house around this *thing*!" Josie screeched. She tried to point

her weapon at the creature, but her eyes landed on a simple patch of grass. She glanced around, turning in a full circle.

The creature had vanished.

"That doesn't make any sense. It was there. It was..." Josie rambled.

Daryl actually uttered the words "calm down."

"No, Daryl. I saw it—I shot it!— and you are *choosing* not to believe me. Like always." Anger replaced the confusion and fear warring in her mind. "And, on top of that, it takes a gunshot to get you out of bed to see what's going on rather than the thing screaming my name a minute ago!"

Moments like these reminded Josie why she divorced Daryl: his constant obsession with making her appear as if she were the crazy one—making her question the reality she lived.

Daryl shook his head. "All right, I'm sorry. Let's just...go inside and talk about this, okay?" *Now he wanted to talk.*

Josie clicked the safety back on and followed him inside, fatigue enveloping her. She sat at the kitchen table, and Daryl made a pot of coffee. After several long minutes, she spoke. "I'm sorry I woke you."

"Don't apologize," Daryl replied, setting a cup of coffee in front of her. The black liquid swooshed and writhed like the flora beneath the creature's skin. "I believe that you saw *something*, Josie. I honestly don't want to say I believe you saw...that."

"Why?" Josie asked him. "You've lived here your whole life, and

you've never mentioned anything strange happening."

"You're new to this place, I know. Things are a bit different, but really, they're no different from life in Bozeman."

Josie mentally sunk deep within herself. She pushed the rising emotions deep down, locking them underneath a trapdoor. Josie inhaled deeply, the thought of arguing with Daryl sending the hairs on her arms prickling. She glanced down into her coffee, and palpitations fluttered in her chest like butterfly wings.

"Let's go to town tomorrow and get ice cream. Sound good?" Daryl asked, taking a long drag off his coffee. A small rivulet of liquid spilled down his chin. The color ran deep red.

She glanced into her coffee cup, meeting the inky black eyes of a sapphire blue butterfly. It blinked and licked its long proboscis out to taste the coffee. Its wings fluttered, splashing coffee over the lip of the cup.

Josie took a deep breath, willing herself to forget the terror that gripped her from earlier. "Okay," she said. She entertained the idea of ignoring all of the strange observations—perhaps that would solve this mess.

Taking a sip of coffee, she tried not to gag as she felt the butterfly's proboscis tickle her tongue. She reached to scratch the bridge of her nose, her fingers instinctively dancing around the delicate green stem and single leaf that had sprouted from her skin.

Gossamer Cryptid

Erin Moine

wake at midnight, aware of she.

Glimmering gossamer wings of a dragonfly, a slumped figure waits

in silence. Legends paint a canvas of her beauty, but not for me.

Eyes, like blinking red stop lights at the

fork in the road. My legs are numb, a tingling in my foot.

The gossamer princess crouches, taking a lock of my

hair between her corporeal fingers.

I inhale, and fall back into bed.

Ya Ritual'Naya Nevesta

Lauren MacDonald

HE woods are hungry and they must feed. It's a custom we must adhere to. They border our village, a prison of sun twisted bark stricken with scorch marks, tightly packed like matted hair. Its branches are hands that demand and consume, scraping the sky in the tangled thousands, emerald in the warmth of summer and frostbitten black in winter. Around here, the seasons are temperamental and are apt to lie to you.

Come spring and summer, the woods lull us to sleep with birdsong and flowers that smell so sickly sweet. Autumn blesses us with apples and fresh meat the forest sacrifices to feed us. We forget during this time about the true nature of the woods, even as the harvest is bountiful. Winter is a different sort of tale; it's the season of starving and leaner times, where the usual food sources have long since moved on, and we have nothing left to eat but the jerky and canned foods from our long barren fields. When that time comes, that is when we remember.

The moment the darkest day of the year crawls out of the moon-lit wilderness and freezes the unfortunate as payment, we remember it. Deep down we all remember. For that's when the forest animals begin to peer out at night and watch us, eyes gleaming with predatory intent. That's when the fires start to sputter and vanish despite how much we keep them supplied. That's when we sense the call to do our duty and feed it. I don't mean a scream or a spoken command that instructs us; instead, it's a rumble that shakes you awake in the middle of an inky night and lingers deep within your bones, leaving you jumpy and tingly long after it ends. If you aren't careful, you might wake up outside in the dark and cold, stripped naked with a basket containing a carving knife

in your hands and a note for funeral plans tacked to your door.

The forest that surrounds our humble village isn't normal by any means. They are hungry and they will feed unless something else is offered in its place. But...it's not the woods that cry for food. Rather, it's the thing that stalks and slinks through the treeline, watching us with moonbright eyes. Be careful and cautious out here. Safety is a privilege, not a luxury.

When the cold starts to seep beneath the cracks of our cottage and the wind howls like an injured man, my father and my sisters look at me with pity and terror. It's then I know what has to be done. After all, I've done this before and will continue to do so for as long as possible. I am what's known in my village as a ritual bride. A placating sacrifice.

I gather the apples, I take the veil, and together the three of us venture out into the woods. Not too long, it wouldn't be polite if I was to get lost long before dark. After all, that is how many died in the first place.

I know the route by heart at this point; Father taught me how to navigate them when the woods made it clear that both my sisters weren't viable candidates. Jessabelle, the oldest, still bears the scars on her left arm while Louise wakes up in the middle of the night laughing the worst kind of mirth until she passes out, drunk from mirth born madness.

We still don't know the cause even now; only that one day one of our village's best hunters vanished without a trace into the trees the day before my birth. They found him, or what was left of him, decorated among the branches in neat segments while a proclamation was crudely scrawled on a scroll fashioned from birch bark, left beside what remained of his gun:

Bestow upon us your prized offerings for a winter's peace. We are hungry, and in need of the best. Heed not this offer, and we will take what is rightfully ours.

We ignored it at first, blaming it instead on the wolves, the starving many that roam these parts. We sent more hunters, more dogs, and closed off the roads to travelers. But when the sacred wine started spoiling, our cheeses curdling within our cupboards, our cattle dying in

swaths, and our children wandering far from home at night, the mayor finally put a stop to it. A few nights later, he pushed forth a decree: feed the woods. Immediately.

So, that is what we did: fresh vegetables and fruits from our vines and branches, the fattest of the livestock, bread still cooling from the ovens, even the finest clothes abandoned among the branches and trunks. But it quickly became apparent that the stranger was particular about what offerings it wanted and who was to be the unfortunate deliveryman. We learned quickly, after it did something to poor Thomas White to make the priest forgo the usual funeral rites. He's still out there I think, hidden within the trees.

I suppose I ought to have been chosen from birth to carry out this ritual; a mockery of a girl cracked and bled into a woman. My hair is nasty, dark brown and ratty unlike Jessabelle's golden waves of sunlight. I'm plump where Louise is skinny, and at night Father has caught me watching the woods. A dangerous habit, I know. But I do this at night, when the shadows grow long, and the howling starts up in the distance, and the rattling of a thousand hoof steps surrounds our cottage. Between the woven bark and finger strand twigs. And I wait for the eyes to find me.

It's not uncommon for the accusations to be slung my way. Witchcraft, they speak with pointing fingers and hushed tones. Dancing beneath the moonlight naked as the day I was born. Singing forgotten tunes that were not deemed church hymns. Glaring at anyone who dared to speak ill of myself and my family. Gathering the herbs and mushrooms to help our next-door neighbor's daughter as she lay in bed dying from her son's screaming birth.

Her tongue is sharp. Speaks without being spoken to.

She hit the vicar and swore at his son.

She's bewitched our men. No wonder the wives can't produce children.

Someone needs to wed her. Maybe that should keep her complacent.

It's true. I should have been wed. Normally, that is.

I should have been at the altar when my eighteenth summer came. I should have had a beau, singing praises about a man with a

shock of dark hair and who makes me smile. I should have had my eldest sister's fiancé; the brave guard captain fresh from the city. I should have been swept off my feet when the vicar's son produced a hand carved ring from one of our sacred trees and proposed to Louise.

I should have. I should have.

But I didn't.

Couldn't.

Can't.

It's dark despite the midday sun. The trees made sure of that. No one who crosses the trails can know how dark it gets. It's like a net; keeps you in and the light out. Soon the torch will become useless half-way down the path. Eventually, it will go out and I will have to rely on memory and rhymes for safety.

I do not know what occurs within these woods. No one does. I suppose that is a mystery that will forever remain until we finally grow brave enough to cut down every sapling, stump, and knot twisted trunk until there is nothing left but the bones. But until that happens, we stick to our homes and hovels at night, huddled around fires that burn as bright as it can and warn our children about what happens when the woods decide that the rules can be broken for just a brief moment.

My foot slips on a rock. I fall, the apples spilling from the basket like gleaming jewels, all the way to the ground. It's steep where I'm at, the forest made it so. Pitfalls and traps to keep you both in and out. In this case, I had put my foot through an imitation of the ground. I can feel nothing beneath me as I pull free and stand, rattled from the experience. After a few deep breaths to calm myself, I pick the apples up one by one and resume my journey.

I'm heading into the heart of the woods, listening for the pulsing heartbeat that connects the trunks, leaves, animals, and every little thing that shares its secrets.

Something glimmers, two by two through the cracks in the oily blackness. I don't stop to stare, it would be rude and dangerous if I did. Instead, I set the basket down and place the veil over my face. The cloth is musty and stinks of the church incense. I know where this veil came from, and I know who last wore it. Both my sisters, last I recall.

Jessabelle had been lucky to be wedded. Louise was more fortunate. I've heard the voices of the village weave into a tapestry of what my life could have been. *Ought* to have been.

It's such a delight to see such perfect couples come from such a bad place.

Perhaps the youngest should take a hint. Follow the examples of her elders.

Have you heard the eldest is going to give birth soon?

Is it a son?

The middle daughter has produced twin boys last I heard.

Honestly, what are we going to do about the youngest?

She needs to grow up.

What is wrong with her anyway.

The miasma of putrefaction slaps me out of the memories. It's hard to look, and harder still to swallow down my breakfast. Here, the corpses of our finest men lie amid the leaves and rocks. I step around them, trying not to think about the trees growing into the bones and flesh, trunks stained brown and red. A path of gore and rot, each leading to a special place. One where I ought to be. Strangely enough, I cannot hear the flies or birds or squelch of scavengers come to pick them clean. I chant the rhymes. I swing the basket. And I think of home.

I think of my sisters. I think of my father. I think of the stares and clucks of the tongue from the women both young and old. I think of the secrets I've learned through this task, of crushing herbs to make medicines and listening to bird calls to warn me of danger and where to find food. I think of my sisters' husbands, tangled up amid the trees.

Most of all I think of what I am going to do when my task is complete.

The more the bodies continue to pile up, the trees interweave, clasping hands of leaves and stringy twigs as the path begins to widen. Here, I can no longer pick out where the corpses end and the trees begin. They've woven into each other at this point, faces and limbs and torsos contorted in blissful agony as they stretch and stretch and stretch until the canopy is blended with frozen flesh and bark. Isn't it grand to know that birch trees have eyes? Or was that the outline of a man mold-

ed into the pulpy wood? Sometimes I stop to listen to the whispers that slither through the wind, cold and blistering. I can barely make it out, but the one that stands out the most is repeated through a whispering breeze:

I once was a witch bride oh me oh my
My groom was handsome and tall and strong
But alas my heart was set on the baker's daughter
Oh me oh my the elders found out
Sent me to die within my mother's tomb
I cursed them barren oh me oh my
Be wary till I return for you.

I know this song. It's a rhyme that was taught to me before my aunt passed away. Prior to her final journey to these woods. Coincidentally, it's also forbidden to chant it back home. And yet it remains my favorite of the rhymes. Here's something you should know if you should ever venture into this part of the woods: if the bodies appear and the rhyme is whispered into your ear, the one who lives and guards this place is bound to appear.

Don't hide. She's already seen you by now.

There's a break in the trees where the light shines on through. A spotlight of gold amid the claustrophobic black. Through the veil I can make it out; a slab of rock carved from a boulder surrounded by the watching birch. Dried leaves crunch underfoot as the rotting miasma trickles away, and soon I am standing in the clearing all alone. The air is cool and sweet, nothing like what lingers outside. Birdsong chimes overhead as a brook babbles nearby. In my peripheral I take in blackberries the size of my thumb knuckle laden with juice poking out of the snowy vines.

The task bids me to approach the triad of rocks jutting out of the ground, sharp and jagged like broken tombstones. No. Like a hand, gently reaching out; sharp basalt fingers grazing the bottom of the shrine, covered in dried leaves and vines, and peppered with dried chamomile and ferns. I set the basket down upon a smooth rock in the middle of the rocks, gently brushing aside the snow with the gentle care of a housewife. The apples glisten invitingly with dew, ripe and red as I

step back, turning away to face the open mouth that is the woods. Then I close my eyes, letting the dark in for the first time. The air is cold and smells of the first fallen snow, crisp and delicate.

I don't know how it happens, but I know that she has arrived. A pressure, squeezing at my head until it pops and the immense buzzing of energy as she awakens. Her voice eloquently curls down my back, velvet smooth with hints of thorns.

Thou hast returned once more.

Something cracks behind me, the sound of bark and stone coming loose from the joints. A shadow crests, taller than the rocks that now housed the apples over the treeline. Her shadow bends and slithers as she glides down the rocks until her shadow eclipses the sunlight. Strangely, it's warm where the shadow touches the land. Warm, like spring weather.

This is gladdening.

Her hand, soft as fawnskin, caresses my cheek right below the jawline. I can't help but giggle. A quick glance at it shows a paw; a hybrid of a wolf and rabbit yet thin as a human.

Allow me.

The veil drops, landing in a puddle of faded white. The journey was long, but now I am here. And she's behind me, waiting for my response. I turn to face her, smiling as widely as I can.

"I'm glad to see you, my bride."

The animal woman behind me is teeth and claws and beautiful in a way I cannot describe.

And I as well my ritual bride.

She cups my face for the expected kiss.

Welcome home.

Yee Naaldlooshii

Addey Christmann

AT on the edge of the old red couch, wrapped in wool blankets head to toe, I relaxed into this place I'd been a thousand times. My black hair braided in two sections and curled around my neck as a makeshift scarf in the questionably heated mobile home. The dark wood paneling started to peel from the walls, the roof leaked in the kitchen, where a bowl was strategically placed under to catch all of the drippings, and the fake linoleum was yellowing and pulling up from the true floor.

I witnessed as my grandfather reached to the furthest parts of his memories, repeating ancient tales from his father, grandfather, tribe, and his Navajo ancestors. He had lived on this same plot of land since he was born, raised on the reservation, and wanted to die here too, and lie in peace next to the rest of his family. The same place that all these stories that lived in his mind were sculpted and shared.

He shifted with the ease of a rusted gate, latched and unmoved for years, each motion looked unnatural as he sank into his dark blue Lazy Boy chair and released his walker. The linesthat scoured his face were earned from many years working this land, from running and raisingcattle and keeping the bills paid for his family, scars hosted memories that ran across his body.

His chapped lips opened, paused, and licked his bottom lip before beginning.

"Those noises you hear at night?" He breathed, letting the question hang in the air, silence spilling into the living room with the lack of response. "Don't look for the reasonings for it. Just act like you ain't

heard nothin'. Bury your head in your pillow, go to bed." He seemed to be looking farther past the wall, past this house entirely, into a moment in time only he can see.

"But what if I ain't inside?" My question squeezed out of me, my breath caught in my throat, but I pressed on, looking at my grandfather's brown eyes, begging for him to look at me, "What if I'm out with the cows?"

His eyes locked with mine, snapping from the past to the present, and held on to mine with a pleading calling. "Do not. I mean it. Do not say their name aloud." By just saying that, I knew what creature he was referring to. The skinwalker.

"This creature will morph its appearance, gain your trust and attack you." His breath had become unsteady, labored, and in this shack of a mobile home, I knew I'd have to run to the neighbors house almost a mile away to call for help if he got any worse.

Even at my young age, I knew the reservation had been left last to receive cell reception, and this old rancher of a grandfather of mine refused to put in a landline. But as he heaved, his breath had begun to steady, "Trusty cow dogs, friendly horses, good lookin' deer and even-keeled neighbors shift into something bony and hellish, walking as though broken from the inside out. Or calls in the woods that sound like a woman screaming in pain, that's them. Those..." His words began to fall apart, right where he was going to declare the name of the creature, the witch, the Yee Naaldlooshii.

I nodded my head, but still watched his face.

"The eyes glow you know," his tone changed, he lifted his hand, his finger unable to point at me directly, but still extended nonetheless. "Even when they play dress up in human skin."

"But what do I do?" I pleaded, my hands shook, pulled the blankets farther up my neck, as though they could protect me from this evil force.

"Well let me get there!" Grandfather chuffed, his face tightened and

puckered up. "Never look 'um in the eye, but don't turn your back to 'um. Move quietly, keep yourself hidden. Get to a shelter. I don't give a damn if it's one of those toilet shacks out in the field, it'll be better than nothing. Burn sage, tell an elder. They can help cleanse and protect." He again seemed out of breath, as though he had run out of time to warn me.

"I'll tell you one story, of when I saw one, well, in a way. I was out, I was in my teens, riding that suicide horse of mine, good ole Cash. Nothin' special that day, just walking the fence, making sure everything was alright. My daddy- your great-grandfather- he made that my job, checkin' on those fences. And down by the creek, there used to be a big growth of pines. And just as I was passing it, I thought I heard a scream. Not no funny scream either. A gut wrenching, fearful cry, beggin' for help."

He sat forward in his chair, beckoned me to lean in. I scooted all the way to the end of the couch, leaning to hear what magic knowledge was to flow from his mouth.

"And don't go tellin' your dad. I ain't never told him this. I'm dead serious kid."

His voice dropped in a cold whisper, "My first thought was to help. Help that girl. Or what sounded like a girl. I started lopin' Cash down that way. But even he stopped. He dug in his heels, refusing to go forward. I kicked and yanked his poor head, but he wouldn't move a damn inch." Cash had been the horse that had won my grandfather his first Suicide Race, he'd been the horse of legend in my family, with golden hair and a black mane and tail that dragged across the ground. Only photos, stories and colts of his lineage were left of him, but this story in particular had been left untold.

Grandfather's face had become heated, his lips going pale. "I dropped those reins and got off, yellin' out for her, tellin' her I could help'er outta there, but she just kept yellin' for help. So I started walkin' in, but I could almost feel someone breathing down my neck. And just

out of the corner of my eye I saw it once I got deeper in those trees. It looked like a dog, mangey though, sick like and thinner than shit."

"We'll what'd you do? Run?" I blurted out, anxiety prickled at my throat.

"Almost!" This time a laugh followed his words, but it was hollow. "I backed out, as fast as I could. Scanning the ground, lookin' for it. Makin' sure it wasn't following me back."

"Cash, as good as always, was still there, but he was pacing and digging at the ground, angry at me- understandably by the way. I ran up as fast as my little legs could carry me, jumped on his back and turned him back home. He ran as fast as he could, no encouragement needed that time."

"When we made it home, I yanked the bridle off and ran in the house, grabbed all the sage tucked away and burned it all." Grandfather began to reach into his pocket and struggled to tug something out. "So I'm givin' this to you. Wear it around your neck, and keep a lighter on your person."

Reaching out, I could see a silver chain dripping from between his fingers, and when he dropped the medallion, it was in the shape of a circle, about an inch wide, with the family brand, the open A6, gold plated in the front. I rotated it in my hand. I could feel the weight behind it, and saw the screw top, and gently opened it with a slight quiver in my hands, and peered inside.

My childlike brain had to take a moment to realize what was inside- a little bundle of sage.

"Burn it when you need it, we can always refill it." He paused, the softness in his voice was so different from the man I had grown to know. "Rather be safe than sorry. Okay kid?" His eyes once again locked with mine, and I could see how important it was to him.

I nodded, and in almost a whisper I asked, "Could you put it on for me?"

"You know my hands don't work so good no more, but I'll give it

a go."

Unwrapping myself from the cocoon of warmth, I knelt with my back to my grandfather, and with his shaky hands, he clipped the necklace together, and hugged me tightly, "I'm not sayin' any of this to scare you, I know you are such a big girl. I just want you to be able to take care of yourself."

I looked at him again and nodded, my eyes brimmed with tears as I buried my head in his shoulder tightly.

...

The haze of the memory melts from my mind, and I am standing in the middle of what was my grandfather's kitchen. I run my fingers over the necklace he had given me fifteen years ago, the same sage sitting in the medallion. All the years I had spent here, with that grouchy old man were still intact, including the floor and walls that were falling apart.

The sun is starting to set, darkness creeping into the house, where most of the lights are either burnt out or missing completely. Just another thing to add to the list.

I allow myself to sit and soak in the reality of the situation. He is gone. He left the house and everything in it to me, along with the sway-back horses and plump cattle in the rocky fields. As I feel the sting of tears begin, I close my eyes, and listen to the crickets that surround the house. I beg to hear the scuff of his slipper, the smell of coffee brewing, the news plaything from the tv, any remnant of him.

But I know it won't come, not today, not ever again.

Now all I have left is a list of chores to get done around the house and a notebook full of handwritten dates.

Then I hear it. It is so faint.

Almost impossible to notice.

It's his voice.

Coming from the walls?

No. Outside.

I jump, race to the door, begging to be able to wrench it open and see that old man. Butdeep down I know it isn't true. Heart pounding almost out of my chest, bile nearing the top of my throat, I lean against the wood, pressing my ear against it to hear. Pausing.

Because this can't be real.

Right?

I want it to be him so badly.

Again it calls, "Lakota, open the door. Please!" My hands reach out before I can even think. I furiously struggle with the door, pleading my fingers to work, but just before I turn the deadbolt, I pause again.

"Grandpa? Is that you?" I force out, and sneak a peek out of the peephole to catch a look, praying though it is impossible that it is him.

And there it is. Inhuman, bony, contorted and ugly. Then it's gone. That is not my grandfather. But I remember what he said about the monstrous creature that he had encountered years ago, and the sage he had kept hidden.

Then a pounding begins, like a knock at the door, becoming more rapid, and feverish, moving to the other side of the house, too fast for a person to be moving. The knocking fills the air, and I can feel it in my chest.

I back away, and reach forward to lock the rest of the door back up, and run for the stash of sage under the sink and begin to burn them, my hand shaking as I hold the lighter, setting each one next to the window, as I hear it scream again.

"Come on Lakota, please just let me in!"

It begins to fade, but my shaking does not. A tear slips down my cheek as I close my eyes and I add two more things to my list of to dos. Call Elder James and buy some more sage.

When It's All Gone

Ella Downs

RE you hungry? What will you eat?"

I turned with a start, bewildered to see a girl standing in my office. "How did you get in here?" The parameters of my building are surrounded with guards, the nation's best.

She shrugged and traced the edge of my desk with her finger. "It does not matter for you to know. But as for my question, what will you eat when it is all gone?"

"I don't understand your question, "my mouth still agape. The girl had a soft glow about her, and I could not determine her age. The longer I stared, I realized I couldn't actually determine anything about her. She had a haunting air about her. I must have had too many sleepless nights, too many meetings discussing the sharp decline of my country, and too many days planning how to escape.

"Look outside; tell me what you see." She spoke in a soft yet commanding manner

Out the window I saw my everyday scene. The lawn and its yellow hue, the trees with their naked branches reaching to the grayish, clouded sky, the high fences and rows of men that guard them. I listed these things to her, confused.

She chuckled. "Do you know that the lawn out there wasn't always that color? Do you know the sky was once a brilliant blue? The

trees out there were full of life and beauty, the branches covered in leaves. You don't remember, do you?"

I did not. How could I? This is what it had always looked like. The things she described only exist in fantasy books I read long ago. Fantasy books that my father had rightly banned. The ideas they produced only held progress back.

Without warning, the girl perched on the edge of my armchair. I flinched back, but she reached out and dug her fingers into my temples. Her touch stung my skin, and I felt that I was falling down...down...

I woke up. I was in a yard. The grass...it was green. The sky was a blinding and bright shade of blue. The air felt fresh; I didn't choke on it.

Somewhere a child laughed. The child ran in front of me, then stopped to look at me. It sent a chill down my spine. Where were the child's caregivers? Why were there no guards on this street? And the colors were wrong. They were bright, and the ground I laid on seemed alive.

I gasped and stood from my chair as if I'd woken from a bad dream. The girl was still with me, now crouched on my desk. Though I still couldn't determine anything about her, everything about her was deeply unsettling and familiar.

"What the hell was that? Who are you?" I demanded.

She hummed, dragging her hands across the desk. I gawked as small flowers sprouted up, leaves and vines slowly curling out of where she'd touched. "You don't remember me at all, do you?" There was a hollowness in her voice. I stared at the desk, then at her, thinking I must've been slipped some kind of drug.

She grabbed my face again, pressing her fingers into my temples. The same falling feeling from before took over me.

This time I stood on a cliffside, rapid winds and cool mist hitting my face. Waves crashed against the rocks below. For a moment my heart pounded, but I wasn't scared. I was overcome with the beauty of the scene before me.

In the next instant, I was in a field of flowers, like the ones I'd only ever seen in paintings destroyed long ago. Colors I didn't know existed, clouds that weren't dark and gray, they hurt my eyes to look at first, but I continued to stare in awe. The sun felt warm against my skin and I hoped that the girl would let me stay a little longer.

Just as my eyes adjusted, the field was ripped away from me. I was surrounded by tall trees, a comforting green hanging from each branch. An animal emerged from the brush. A deer, I believe.

I stood and stared. I'd never seen anything so brilliant in all my life. Had something like this truly existed? Why had I never seen something this magnificent before now?

Then the deer opened its mouth.

"How dare you not remember me, when your bloodline is the one that killed me?" The girl's voice echoed around me with the force of one-hundred voices, and my stomach turned icy cold. My surroundings changed again, and again, a kaleidoscope of swirling flowers, water, animals, mountains. "How dare you use me, drill me, murder me, then say you do not remember? I have fed you, I have bathed you, I have housed you. All that you have to live is because of me. And you have murdered me."

The images were changing more rapidly. The fields of flowers were destroyed with large machines, the trees caught fire, the ocean beneath that cliffside turned black. I grabbed at my throat as the smoke burned and filled my lungs. I couldn't see clearly. The filthy air stung my

eyes. I wanted to scream out in pain, yet I couldn't make a single noise.

Just when I thought that surely, I would die, I was thrown back to my own reality. My office was still there. I was still there. And the girl...

She was leaning over on my desk, heaving for breath. She coughed. Black oily blood splattered on my desk.

She glared at me, her eyes brimming with betrayal. "You and your forefathers ensured that this would be my end. It is far too late for me now; every warning sign I ever gave was ignored. Every single second chance you were given, you pushed it aside. Now that I've finally been pushed to my end, I ask again: What will you eat? What will you eat when I am no longer?"

My throat tightened as more oily blood spilled from her lips. She trembled and began to stumble to the floor, and I found myself reaching out to catch her. She was only a child.

"Oh God..." my mind frantically raced to come up with some solution, some way to remedy this situation. My stomach twisted sharply as I realized there was no time. Her skin turned an ashy gray and flaked away. The color and glow left her body with every cough until she finally collapsed and crumbled away to mere ash in my arms.





The White Tiger

Helen Scullin

TAR, sun, and moon
Wave from western skies,
Greeting she who grieves
Of harrowed human lives.

Descending from her mansion In a silent Shangri-la Appears the deathly tiger: Herald of evening star.

Paws melded into snow Brush past deserted bone Faced toward creeping dusk, Declining one's true home.

Stripes imbued with yin, A white world forevermore. Souls reaching for horizon: Heed her esoteric roar!

Duende de la Paz

Johanna Deletti

OY Siciliana Americana, Blood born, trained, and raised in America. Pero tengo espíritu de Mexicana Chingona, pero ahí me llaman la gringuita.

This poetic escape releases my duende, inside MLA format citations.

This country drives fast to fly far away, quotations, immigrations, deportations.

Marmalade speeches sap of bitter war, My words dance on paper like Emily D. A funeral tangos in the mind's core; Will American land ever be of the free?

Scottish, Egyptian, Chipriota, también, We are all born from somewhere in the end.

Silence of Translation

Cole Grennan

RADUTTORE, traditore. To translate is to betray. Translator and journalist Robert Bethune translated the old Italian saying, literally: "translator, traitor." The saying highlights that translation betrays the intention of the original text. An audience reading a translation will never understand the meaning and the intention of the original. Translators inevitably alter a text, despite even the best of intentions, putting their own words into the author's mouth.

A famous example is the 1901 Icelandic translation of Bram Stoker's Dracula (1897). It was over a century later, in 2014, that scholars realized that the long-accepted translation was instead erotic fanfiction of the classic Gothic novel. While Makt Myrkranna (1901) was reportedly well-written and well-loved — more so than the original, in some cases — it is an extreme case of a translator taking liberties with their responsibilities.

This being said, it is unfair to withhold any liberties from translators. Translation is not an exact science, and it can never be. Translation is an art. The way language and culture coalesce to create unique connotation and give significance

to words and phrases means that translators have to choose between staying true to the source material or remaining faithful to its meaning. The letter of the law, versus the spirit.

How does one choose between the literal meaning and intention? When no middle ground exists, the choice lies with the translator. Do we hem and haw and find a direct translation, or take artistic license? When translating novels from Mandarin to English, certain honorifics —terms of address — don't have direct equivalence without losing their cultural significance. Terms like gege and meimei, literally translated as 'big brother' and 'little sister,' are rooted between the familial and romantic. They're commonly used as terms of endearments between romantic couples and have lost the familial connotation in recent generations due to China's one child policy — despite the literal meaning being unchanged. A direct translation might confuse readers who only speak English, as calling a romantic partner "big brother" may be off-putting to those unfamiliar with the cultural nuance behind the terms.

Translators have the difficult job of balancing authenticity with cultural understanding. That being said, some purposefully use specific words and phrases that change the meaning of the story in order to fit their own narrative. These translators effectively silence the original story, erasing the narrative in favor of one they prefer to tell.

When all is said and done, who gets to tell your story? Who gets to say what is

taken out, or inserted, in order to appease the conscious of the hoi polloi? When our records are found in a hundred years, a thousand, and language has evolved beyond our understanding, who will stand for the truth as you have written it? Story telling is the innate sentient need to understand, and to be understood. What happens to your memory when your story is mistold?

It is important to engage with all literature, but especially translations, intentionally. Using radical self-critique, consider the intentional choices the translator has made. Why are the Danes damned to hell, when Pagan cultures generally do not believe in its existence? Why are the women in the story referred to as sub-human, with slurs and crass language? Just as the author and translator were intentional in their word choice, so must the reader be intentional in their critique.

Cross-Cultural Translation:

When translators look on the host culture as less than, or perhaps disdain their culturally specific practices, they may make intentional choices that frame the host culture in a negative light. Western Anglophonic societies have a long history of this. It goes hand in hand with conquest — colonization.

The earliest example comes from Beowulf. Beowulf is the oldest piece of English literature scholars have recovered. Written sometime between 975 and 1025 $_{
m A.D.}$, it is a 3,182-line epic poem about the Geatish hero, Beowulf. The story takes place several centuries before it was written, among the pagan Danes. The author

MANASTASH

of Beowulf, unknown, translated this pagan story to a context with which their Christian audience and self could relate (Heaney).

The author adding Christian themes to a pagan poem erases the culture of the Danes and the Geats. Though this is the earliest example, it is certainly not the last. Look at Christian rap — the ways that white Christian Evangelicals use Black culture for profit, while vilifying that same culture in the process. Christian culture has a long history of cannibalizing other cultures and converting that culture into something palatable for Christian audiences.

Beowulf is an intentional silencing of the pagan cultures that the poet was writing about. Seamus Heaney says in the introduction to his Beowulf translation: "As a consequence of his doctrinal certitude, which is as composed as it is ardent, the poet can view the story-time of his poem with a certain historical detachment and even censure the ways of those who lived in illo tempore:

Sometimes at pagan shrines they vowed

Offerings to idols, swore oaths

That the killer of souls might come to their aid

And save the people. That was their way,

Their heathenish hope; deep in their hearts

They remembered hell. (ll. 175-80)" (xvi).

Silencing is the deliberate act, while silence is the inevitable consequence. Perhaps inevitable is the wrong word. There is always a choice for the original speaker to fight for their voice to be heard, but often the original speaker has the stones of history stacked against them. The original authors of Beowulf were long dead when the poem was translated into Old English, and then again into our modern vernacular. What can they say in protest from beyond the grave? Although not all silence stems from silencing, nearly every act of silencing produces silence.

This rhetoric pervades throughout the poem, labeling the Danish culture as hell bound. By expressing such disdain, the author effectively silences the Danes, as they erase any nuance said culture might have in favor of a Christian lens. The erasing of cultures is an authoritarian tool of oppression, and it has proved effective. The first step of discrimination is dehumanization.

Shari Stenberg, in her essay, Cultivating Listening: Teaching from a Restored Logos, defines two opposing practices as hunting and cultivating. She says, "To cultivate rather than hunt—that is, to capture and destroy—another's words or ideas is to rethink entrenched academic practices that value critique at the expense of assent (Booth and Elbow) and that position disciplinary members in agonistic relation to one another." (252). In this way, the author of Beowulf became a hunter, rather than a cultivator. Hunting is single-minded, focused only on the outcome. Cultivation, then, is to work in community with other scholars to develop one's conclusion over time.

The author of Beowulf did not care for the culture of the Danes or the Geats, the very people they were composing this epic about. They were single-minded in their assurance that their worldview was the correct one and labeled the Danes as heathens. They hunted the concept of the Danes, and in effect, erased them. Rather than appreciating the distinct culture of the Danes and the Geats, they silenced them in favor of their own worldview. Though their practices and mythologies have long been lost to time, we know they had an oral tradition. We know they named their swords. We know they lived communally. What else has been lost, due to invasion and the impenetrable tread of time?

This intentional silencing was due to the cultural disparity between the author and the subject. The author could not conceive of the Danish culture as something worth commemorating. They enclosed the story of Beowulf inside of their own values and effectively silenced their subjects.

Gendered Translation:

Gender plays a significant role in the language choices of translators. The Odyssey, traditionally translated by men, had been reinterpreted countless times before a woman translated it into English for the first time. In 2018, Emily Wilson, a British classicist and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, took on the task, making intentional linguistic choices that often challenged those of her predecessors, offering a fresh perspective on the text.

One notable passage is near the end of the text, after Odysseus has returned from his voyage. Odysseus had wandered for ten years, being chronically unfaithful to his wife — Penelope — who fended off suitors vying for the throne for all that time. Those suitors took other women to bed in their time camped out in Odysseus' palace — often enslaved girls in their teens. Odysseus killed the suitors once he returned to Ithaca and commanded his son — Telemachus — to kill the enslaved women who had slept with them.

The widely accepted translation of Telemachus' speech goes:

"No clean death for the likes of them, by god! / Not from me — they showered abuse on my head, my mother's too! / You sluts — the suitors' whores!" (Fagles 378).

While Wilson chose different language:

"I refuse to grant these girls a clean death, since they poured down shame on me and Mother, when they lay beside the suitors." (Wilson 378)

When comparing these two translations, there is a clear distinction in the gendered language. Fagles leans heavily into disrespectful language, calling the enslaved young women "sluts" and "whores." He doesn't grant them the dignity of referring to them as human beings. His language choices frame their execution as justified, reinforcing Telemachus and Odysseus' perspective. By denying these women personhood, the translation downplays the brutality of their fate — they

were raped over the twenty years of Odysseus' absence and then murdered for it.

This language erases the deeper meaning of the text. The girls were slaves, and like many cases throughout history, were not in a position to say 'no' to these powerful men. Through her intentional language choices, Wilson grants the girls the dignity of their circumstances, acknowledging their position and their lack of power. She gives voice to a story that has long been silenced.

Fagles' word choices represent instrumental listening. Instrumental listening is defined by hunger. The listener consuming the rhetoric to further their own agenda. Andrea Lunsford and Adam Rosenblatt describe instrumental listening as the instances "where the reporter listens not to know a person or to form a relational connection through listening but to obtain that person's objectified experience, which in some ways then no longer belongs to him or her." (133). Fagles took the original text and chose the translation that best subscribed to the narrative that he wanted to tell. He put the weight of morality on the shoulders of the girls, instead of Odysseus.

Likewise, this is an example of the Seer position. Melissa Ianetta drew three perspectives from her analysis of Aspasia's silence and Edgar Alan Poe's The Purloined Letters. She says:

"... each position can be summarized in terms of the "glance" the subject position casts upon the signifier: The first is based on a glance that sees nothing:

the King.... The second is based on a glance which sees that the first sees nothing and deceives itself into thereby believing to be covered what it hides: the Queen.
... The third is based on a glance which sees the first two glances leave what must be hidden uncovered to whomever would seize it: the [thief]. In other words, Poe's tale presents us with three distinct yet interrelated perspectives—the blind, the seer, and that actively seeing position, here termed the seeker." (Ianetta 27)

The Seer — the second position — is when the analyst draws a conclusion based on an initial glance, without further investigation. They use instrumental listening to draw the easiest conclusion, nominally based on the provided evidence. Often times, the Seer constructs their conclusion around the verdict they approve of and gather their evidence around that conclusion.

Fagles either didn't care about the story of the slave girls, or he felt they were unnecessary to the story. The context of who the girls were, and why they slept with the suitors, wasn't a priority for him to analyze or include in his translation.

As a Seer, he translated the conclusion that he wanted audiences to come away with, which was that the slave girls were "whores" (378) that deserved their fate. In doing this, he silenced the truly haunting choice that Odysseus made.

The Greek's were a notoriously misogynistic society, so I can't speak for authorial intent, but I can say that Fagles choice to demean the women of The Odyssey betrays and silences the original story. In Wilson's translation, Odysseus' choice to execute the slave girls was hypocritical and villainous, and she was intentional

in that choice. Fagles, of course, couldn't villainize his hero, and thus chose words that would make his choice justified.

Translators have many reasons to change the meanings of the original authors — be they cultural, gendered, religious, or something else. Whatever reason they may have, their intentional choices silence the voices of their authors. This silencing leads to gaps in the scholarship and erases the effort that authors put into their work.

This is not to say that all translators are intentional in their bias. Even unconscious bias can, and does, affect the outcome of the translation. It is important for readers to be aware of how bias can affect translation. In order for them to do so, they must be critical of the translator's choices and must engage with the translation prepared for "radical self-critique" (Lunsford and Rosenblatt 143). Rhetorical listening is the most effective tool when evaluating the bias of any translation.

The Warmth Before Memory

Ariel Lee

OU are standing underneath the willow tree. You are looking down a driveway at a house that used to be. The tree's boughs are a great hoop skirt that conceals a marvelous playhouse- a room with vaulted ceilings that shiver in the wind and whisper to the children inside. Next to the tree there is a foundation. The foundation is a skeleton of the house that the grandmother's grandparents built. The foundation is off-limits to children. It isn't safe. You shouldn't climb on it. There are dogs and cats. Most of them are nice and will want a scratch. There are coops, there are chickens, turkeys, geese. There is a sister who might tell you that the turkeys will give you a kiss if you poke a finger through the wire fencing. Don't believe her- the turkeys will bite. There is a great garden in the back. There are

rolly-pollies and centipedes. There is a porch. The porch has a can-crusher. There is a grandmother who is almost finished with her Pepsi and the children will bicker over whose turn it is to take the can and crush it. The grandmother will give the children a popsicle if they ask. The grandmother is gentle and warm. The grandmother doesn't like to go to town. The grandmother likes the Maid-O-Clover drive-thru. She goes there to buy milk so she won't have to go inside a store. The grandmother will buy the children a scoop of bubblegum ice cream, too. The grandmother will stop by the nursery to buy dying plants. (The grandmother had a green thumb, they say.) The grandmother has an incubator in her bedroom that she uses to rescue birds. (The grandmother had a gift with animals, they say.) The grandmother will let the children sleep in her bed if they are scared. (They say the children were her whole world.)

A Sonnet for My Father

Noel Nephew

HE death of Robin Williams was like the death in the family. He was the father figure I never had, and suddenly he was gone. Suicide, they said. Tears of a clown. I know those tears well. That sudden, silent, sadness after a night of performing for others I learned early on that I couldn't be the pretty one So it was important that I became funny. The depression that arrived in my twenties made it harder to make this monkey dance. Thank God for SSRIs My actual father died as soon as child support was done. And all he left me was his weak ankles, at least, according to my mother. I wouldn't know, I never met that guy.

"Other Girls and Womxn in Whom I See Versions of Myself:"

A Conversation with Poet Laura Read

Johanna Deletti & Madison Bourguignon



AURA Read's third poetry collection, *But She Is Also Jane* (Winner of the Juniper Prize from University of Massachusetts Press), was released in April 2023, delivering a sharp commentary on misogyny, shame, and many other facets of the female experience. In the context of our current political climate, the collection remains funny, disarming, and painfully relevant. Read is playful with her use of narrative forms, tackling socio-political themes while also delving into shadowed layers of the past.

Read's ekphrastic poem, "In the Same Way We Misunderstand the Child Ballerinas of Degas," engages the art of French Impressionist Artist Edgar Degas, along with a range of issues, from anti-Semitism to innocence lost. In another poem, Read reflects on Monica Lewinsky, mistakes, and double standards. The collection's opening piece, "RIP,

Laura's Vagina," is a satirical non-eulogy for what a doctor calls the speaker's "devitalizing" body part—which the speaker insists, through hilarious subplot, "still works."

On March 7, 2025, just before we initiated this interview, Laura Read's "Love Poem with Staples" was featured on the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day. Her poem is embroidered with threads of grief, vulnerability, and womanhood. It felt, somehow to us, prescient: at the time of this writing, we are on the cusp of spring in Seattle, eagerly waiting as the days grow longer and brighter. As sunlight begins peeking shyly through Washington's overcast, that hopeful feeling in the air is reflected amid the poem's loss, where it "fills up / the room and makes us feel / like things will be all right" (51-53).

The study of language and poetics is a vast and ongoing one. As passionate students of literature, we found ourselves particularly inspired by the feminist commentary present within Read's works and wanted to engage further on her ideas—which we did, as a final project in our Poetry and Poetics course with Professor Maya Jewell Zeller. Read graciously agreed to answer some of our questions over email, resulting in a conversation on the exploration of time and memory, grief, healing, the fulfillment found in community, and the role reclaiming plays in creating feminist art. Read shares further insight on current and upcoming projects, where she finds inspiration, and the events that have shaped her as a person and an artist.

Laura Read's next poetry collection, *The Serious World*, will be out in October 2025 from BOA Editions.

This interview was conducted over email, by Johanna Deletti and Madison Bourguignon, as a final project for Professor Maya Jewell Zeller's Poetry and Poetics Course, March 2025.

Johanna Deletti is a copywriter, hospitality professional, and ESL instructor from Boston, Massachusetts. She is in her senior year at CWU, completing her BA in English with a focus on Professional and Creative Writing. Her inspiration for poetry is derived from her love for the Spanish and Italian languages, alongside an effort to explore justice through the art of poetry. She has served as the Lion Rock Visiting Writers Series Literary Intern from Fall 2024 through Spring 2025. Her work has appeared in *The Unsealed*, a motivational poetic platform that aims to heal and inspire, in a collection of self-reflective letters and empowering poetry.

Madison Bourguignon is a former professional tennis player who recently moved back to the Pacific Northwest, after over a decade of living in South Florida. She is a transfer student at CWU, majoring in English and Professional and Creative Writing. In addition to being a dedicated reader of literature, she is an avid consumer of *The Paris Review's* interview columns; she holds a particular interest in exploring artistic identities beyond the artists' published works.

1. JD & MB: You are extremely active in local arts programming in your community, as an educator, Spokane's former poet laureate, and a creator yourself. Your active interest in literary events alongside poets such as Ada Limón, Gabrielle Bates, and Maya Jewell Zeller is truly admirable. What does partaking in this community mean to you as an artist? How does it impact the way you approach your work?

LR: I am very active in my community, or at least I try to be. I teach full-time at Spokane Falls Community College and part-time in Eastern Washington University's MFA program, so I'm very busy with my jobs, but my jobs are connected to the literary community of Spokane as well, so I attend readings, teach at community workshops, etc. My job at EWU is one I choose to do on top of my full-time job because it is so rewarding, and I think my work there best illustrates how community impacts my creative work. I enjoy working with all of my students, but my connections to my graduate students and their work are perhaps the most fulfilling because I get to help them as they write and defend their thesis. This past weekend, I spent an afternoon with one of my thesis advisees from last year, Keely, and two other students in the program. We went to Keely's farm and workshopped poems, not because we had to, but because we wanted to. Because we've formed such a special community that this is what we want to do on a Saturday afternoon. Last night I was revising a poem I'd shared with them, and I emailed one of the poets, Liz, who had an idea for the last line, to see if I'd gotten it right. My work is often inspired by the books we read together, the poems we write together, and the relationships we form.

2. JD & MB: But She Is Also Jane is your third full-length published collection. What aspect of beginning new projects most excites you, and what do you find most challenging?

LR: I love new projects! I feel sad when I don't have one. But She Is Also Jane wasn't originally the book it became; it started out as poems that addressed aging and the different selves we collect over the course of a life. It was originally called Aurelia, which is a reference to the moon jellyfish in the poem, "Jellyfish," and the line "Everything has another name." (See my interest in doubles that I addressed in the question about the Janes!). But then I realized I had several poems in the book that were overtly feminist and political, and I decided to lean into that a little more. When I arrive at a title or concept, this gives me more ideas for new poems I could write, and the book takes off from there. My new book, *The Serious World*, which will be out in October, started out as a chapbook of poems, written to Sylvia Plath, about mental health and illness during the pandemic. It changed though when I took some classes on Marguerite Duras and Simone de Beauvoir and added them to the book. What I find the most challenging is finding a starting point. I never mind when that starting point evolves into something else, but sometimes it does take a while to get a new project going. The manuscript I'm working on right now had a weird beginning. I started by writing poems about Terwiliger Plaza, a retirement home in Portland where my parents are living, as a way to write about aging and change and losing my parents, but then I started writing about the television show Call the Midwife because I watch that show with my mom when I go stay with her at Terwilliger, and now the book has several poems about the tv show, and its working title, *The Moth*er House, is a reference to the show as well. So that took me in a new direction, and it will probably keep changing since I'm very early in the process. I'm also writing about photographs and photography, so that may be a braid in the collection, and that is helping me generate new poems as well.

3. JD & MB: In your 2023 interview with The Inlander, you spoke on the roles time and memory play in your creative process—can you talk more about that? What is the recollection of memories like for you, in the writing process?

LR: Losing my dad as a young child forever shaped who I became, as a person and as an artist. I am always trying to get back to the time when he was alive. Poems help me do this. They help me picture the bedroom I slept in then. And that sometimes gives me a glimpse of something I hadn't remembered about that house, that time, my dad, who I was then. I find it both sad and healing. And also surprising. I like the ways different memories from different times can be stitched together in a poem to help me reach new realizations.

4. JD & MB: This collection's epigraph comes from Sylvia Plath, The Bell Jar: "My heroine would be myself, only in disguise." In a 2017 interview with Spokane Public Radio, you read two poems referred to as "self-portraits" — do you consider the heroines in this collection, of which there are numerous, to be versions of yourself, or "self-portraits"?

LR: I think I answered this one in the question about the title, but I love that you referred to the epigraph. :)

5. JD & MB: Inspired by the line, "I had designed myself to be feminine" (Read 25), what are your thoughts on female stereotypes, and how does this play a role in your writing? Is "The Cheerleader" a reclaiming? Do you believe in reclaiming?

LR: Yes, I think "The Cheerleader" is a reclaiming, and I definitely believe in reclaiming. I think "RIP, Laura's Vagina" reclaims as well. And "Phallogocentric." And "Jane Doe 1-9." Reclaiming is one of the things that makes me want to write. If something makes me angry, I want to talk back to it, but because I've been so conditioned by my gender role, I very rarely do, in real life as they say, so I need poems! I think the time period in which I grew up was a very gendered time, and this time period we're living in now less so, so my age has influenced my interest in female stereotypes because I felt so limited by and hurt by them.

6. JD & MB: There is a rebellious, empowering feminism in this collection; Keetje Kuipers said it "called up such a horrible sense of recognition as a woman." Comparatively, what role do you envision for men who might read your book?

LR: Maybe they will find it educational. I think it's always good to read about and imagine experiences outside our own because it can make us more compassionate.

7. JD & MB: "In a discussion of beauty, let us not forget ugliness" (Read 18). Will you talk about your admiration for France? What is it about Edgar Degas' French impressionistic paintings that sparked your interest to reveal its layered meanings toward misogyny and the greater cultural understanding of women's roles in society?

LR: I went to France for my junior year of college and, especially because I have very rarely left home for an extended period of time, this year made a big difference in my life. I love the French language and French art, and I find that my interest in and my memories of France come into my poems frequently. What specifically interested me about Degas is how different his biography is from his paintings. I think I read an article about him and then saw how little I'd understood him just from viewing his paintings and sculptures. This relates to your question about "The Music Box" as well, the question the speaker poses, "Is everything good also bad?" I guess I think it is, and that's fascinating.

8. JD & MB: Regarding the two-part format of But She Is Also Jane, did you compose the series to address girlhood and womanhood, or some other thematic element? And how do you hope this collection's progression connects the reader and audience with its speakers?

LR: I think I was thinking of the poems in the first section as being more about childhood and the ones in the second section as being more about the speaker's later years.

9. JD & MB: The titular line from this collection - "Jane is pulling her / But she is also Jane" - carries a central theme. Is there a part of you as a woman and an artist that sees pieces of yourself in the women around you? Do you view the female experience as a shared experience?

LR: I am always writing poems about other girls and women in whom I see versions of myself. They're often even just titled by the respective girl's or woman's name, for example, "Erin," in this collection. I am working on a new book tentatively called The Mother House, and I noticed that I've already done two poems titled with women's names. I'm also very interested in doubles, which I reference in my forthcoming collection, *The Serious World*, and in the book I'm working on now. So yes, I do see pieces of myself in other people who identify female, and yes, I do see the female experience as a shared one. Of course, everyone's experiences are different, but there are some experiences that are particular to people who identify as female, in my opinion. Also, I think this may be becoming less true than it was when I was coming of age in the 70s and 80s as we are rethinking gender in big ways right now, so it might be truer to say that there are shared experiences among female-identifying people and non-binary people.



Phantasmagoric Reflection

Helen Scullin

found myself entranced by the beauty of Japan for years, maybe even decades at this point. With my hands clasped delicately behind my back, I had entered the domain of an onsen, the hot spring waters just a few steps away. My hands had to now separate from their companionship—slowly drifting past my back with one on each side of my waist. Now, in perfect unison, they coiled along the bottom hem of my shirt and lifted the fabric across and off my being. Still parallel and fully synchronized with each other, my hands cautiously do the same routine for my pants, briefly hesitating before finally stripping my skin delicately of each undergarment.

I found myself out of my element and out of my comfort. I wondered if it was still possible to retreat, if my hands would undo the monumental effort they just accomplished. But, if I were to pry my gaze from the floor my bare feet planted themselves to, I could see the onsen and the other women within—the women who did not abstain from the waters out of fear like I was, but instead pursued their desires of bliss. My heart raced thinking of entering the room but pursued with rapid intensity when thinking about what happened after: bathing within the spring itself. With a sharply inhaled breath, strongly heated from the steam emanating from the hot spring, my mind had guided my feet to graze across the floor one after the other towards the water.

I found myself hunched along the edge of ebbing water, with the tips of my right toes surveying the heat pulsating below them. Slowly, and with poorly concealed trepidation, I plunged my foot below the surface as the waves now lapped at my skin with great anticipation. The onsen, having tasted the first of the flesh I offered it, had now began releasing an unrelenting and sweltering heat from its maw. Even as it scorched me, as I observed the delicate skin along my dry calf tinging pink from the creeping heat, I desired to give in further. With my heart backing my mind, I fed more of my being into the onsen, guiding my right calf and thigh to plunge into the depths below. My left half pursued the same: easing itself into the onsen as if yearning to share the senses of the other side. My hands simultaneously reach below the water's surface as well and guide my upper body to join the rest of my scorching flesh below. Now, as I rest alone in one of the many hot spring pools, I can ease my mind and experience the immense pleasure of the onsen.

I found myself letting out a heavy sigh of relief at being concealed once again, the pale blue waters now obscuring my body. The writhing heat that reaches across my whole body no longer instills pain, but rather relaxation: an allowance from both the water and I to lose myself. I could feel the steam that permeated the room slowly warming my face, which previously had brows furrowed and teeth clenched in a way I had not noticed—sometimes, you can only know that something had existed once you see that it is gone. Once the heat of the onsen is no longer stinging my body is when I can remember how the air outside had deceptively cool autumn breezes. I can permit my mind, body, and soul to focus only on the present moment now and sink further into the warmth of the onsen. The water's undulating grasp cradles me tighter, now comfortably swathing me as if we were kindred. Liquid hands are glossing along every possible facet of my body, as though mother nature herself has blessed this onsen with an incredibly soothing aura. Her palm plants itself along the curve of my left cheek as the soft splashes of waves whisper words of compassion to my soul. The nerves of my eyes

had been lulled by the heat into resting, but their dampness from the onsen's kindness could no longer be contained. As I fluttered them both to rise, the emotions sloshing within me had now breached beyond my eyes, trickling along my face, and finally diving down at the crest of my chin to become one with the water. Having been too enraptured with the nurturing sensation of the hot spring I had not noticed how truly at peace and content I had now become; I had neither wavering within my throat nor quivering of my lips. Before regaining my full composure, I peered within the clear depths and no longer saw just steam fumes and waves below.

I found myself. Both my eyes locked with the ones gazing back at mine. My mind and heart grow warmer as I am enchanted by the image before me. A vivid apparition of a woman fused with the water's rippling surface, yet she remains still enough for me to make out her form. She tilts her head in the same way I do mine and curls her lips into a grin when she notices I do the same. She stares with unrelenting eyes that pierce through the hazy environment we share, joining us together. My mind begins to drift as I focus on her, her shape now distorting and obscuring from the thickening steam, but her eyes are still locked to me. It's as if she is linked with me, as if the geothermal waters that gushed from below us had melted my skin and bones—leaving me as just a soul—so we could share this moment. As if I am an egg bobbing and boiling along the spring, her gaze cracks my shell and strips me bare. Her eyes locking down on me, her target, with absolute coordination. As my core seeps out, I stain the sizzling water with my essence. We are miscible. We embrace each other. I can feel you now with the same fiery passion that you felt for me. I can no longer see you, but I can feel your heat pulsating through me in waves. This overwhelming heat... this onsen... is where I found myself...



From Eden

Cole Grennan

OU'RE here to find something, but you've gotten lost. The sun has begun to set, and your phone is dead. You forgot what you came here for, but it was important. You remember it was important, like the ghost of honey on your tongue. Do you wish to proceed?

- 1. Yes
- 2. Do I have a choice?

To the North rises an ocean of wheat, golden in the fading sunlight. It shifts in waves, glinting like gold, but you can see shadows swimming in its depths. To the East sits a forest, green and red and great in its splendor. You see movement in the branches, but the creatures are gone when you blink. To the South lie great plains, rolling hills as far as the eye can see.

The sun casts shadows where there should be none. There's nothing there to cast them. There's nothing to the West. You don't look. You never look. Which way do you go?

- 1. Forwards, I'm not a coward.
- 2. Backwards, I don't want to play anymore
- 3. Left, my mother's left-handed, so I've always held affection for the direction
- 4. Right, nothing can go wrong when you pick the right path

The forest rustles before you, trees taller than your eyes can reach.

The trees sway in a breeze you can't feel, gentle and lovely.

- 1. I enter the path set before me; a road almost big enough for my car to fit—but not quite. I'll have to walk, but that's okay. If I stay on the path, I'll know which way I came. I know not to step off the path.
- 2. I stare, for a long time I was the shadows flittering through the leaves. They're playful, dancing like sunlight. Dancing like children. I'm not stupid enough to enter without permission.
- 3. There's a foot path, old and worn with new growth just sprouting through. The path hasn't been touched in years. It looks welcoming, like the touch of an old friend. A forgotten lover.
- 4. The trees open just ahead, a shrouded arch of draping branches and sharp leaves. Like the one I was married under, long enough ago that I forgot the exact color of our bridesmaids' dresses. The way the rain fell. I think I see my wife ahead, draped in white and

glowing. I came out here to find them, I'm pretty sure. Why else would I be here?

The foliage crunches beneath your feet, branches and twigs and leaves crackling under your weight. You feel bad, yours are the first footprints against this earth in a lifetime. Human footprints, at least.

- I shouldn't be here. This forest is not my friend, I know this.
 I've known this. There's a reason we always agreed to stay on the marked paths.
- 2. I see her, just ahead. White dress catching on branches and thorns as she walks through the underbrush. I cry out but she can't seem to hear me. I can't even seem to hear me. Where has my voice gone?
- 3. I must've made the wrong choice. There... I thought this was the way she came. This is where she said she'd be. This is where her GPS said she last was. She must've taken a different path, perhaps the footpath I saw a while back.
- 4. The birds chirp above me, tiny bodies flitting through the branches on feather light wings. The sunlight glints off of their beaks, flashes of light that guides my way. The forest is thick, but nothing is impenetrable.

Behind you, a branch snaps.

- 1. I freeze. Every breath echoes too loud in my ears. Faintly, like a flute played in the next room just loud enough to hear over the sautéing of vegetables, laughter floats on the breeze.
- 2. Haha, there's nothing there but forest. Nothing there at all.
- 3. This is a forest, of course there's going to be large creatures. Most of them are prey animals, most predators don't come out until after dark, I'm pretty sure. We just finished a marathon of Planet Earth, so I know what to do if the thing behind me is less friendly than your average deer.
- 4. The birds have stopped chirping. Around me, the forest hangs in perilous silence. Why are the birds silent? Where have they gone?

You turn, slowly.

- 1. There's nothing there, only darkness. I can't see past the branches I just ducked under, long and spindly and sharp. It's the kind of dark that breathes, pulsing with life in the way that feels like a heartbeat, like a lost friend. There's nothing there, nothing at all.
- 2. There's someone standing there. Someone tall, limbs too long, and fingers even longer. He has no face, but that doesn't stop him from looking at me. I'm trapped, I can't move, oh, god, he's moving closer, oh, god, please help me. Someone please help me.
- 3. I don't turn around. You're never supposed to turn around in the

forest, don't you know that? It just tells the creatures following you that you know they're there. If they don't know that you know, they'll stay in their shadows. They won't come into the light.

4. There are eyes watching me, from all around. I can see them, glowing red and green and white, like those nature documentaries we would watch when it was hard to sleep. You know the ones at night, where the bob cat's eyes glow green as she snarls at the camera.

You run, tearing down the path like a spooked horse.

- 1. That wasn't a deer. Oh, god, that wasn't a deer.
- 2. There's nothing following me. I cannot hear the footstep just inches from my heels. I cannot feel the warm breath on the back of my neck. I do not see it. It is not there.
- 3. Those eyes follow me, close enough to touch, and they're going to get me. They're faster than I could ever hope to be, silent in their pursuit. They're toying with me, I know, but I can't stop running. If I stop running, then the game will be over.
- 4. I can hear him following me. He runs, careless, smacking into trees and branches like a living thing wouldn't. Like a puppet controlled by a particularly cruel master. His arms trail by his

sides, long fingers scratched and bloodied and wrong. Like he was clawing at something. There's dirt under his nails. I can hear him breathing, but he doesn't have a mouth.

The forest is closing in around you, trees bending and creaking and groaning. If they had eyes, they'd be following you. Maybe they do have eyes. You can feel them on your back. Long, twisted fingers grasp at your arms, your hair, your clothing. You tear through them, uncaring. There is a light up ahead, a solemn glow between the wild leaves. You aim towards it, desperate, reaching, aching. Without warning, the ground disappears under your feet. You tumble, aimlessly, over the edge of a cliff you never saw coming. You never even reached the light.

- 1. I scream. I can't stop screaming. My throat cracks, dry and rusted and bloodied.
- 2. Like a dream, I wake before I hit the ground. It was only an illusion; the earth is solid under my feet.
- 3. There isn't a cliff. There never was a cliff. You're lying to me.
- 4. I tumble, weightless, but the ground never grows closer.

If you were to wind up back where you started, if you got a second chance— would you make better choices? Would you make them worse? Are you capable of changing this ending for the better? Are you capable of changing yourself?

- 1. I don't know, I'm still falling.
- 2. Of course I would, I take every chance for growth I'm afforded.

 Now that I know where I end up, I can change that. I'm the only one who can control what I do.
- 3. I see birds floating around my head, tiny and blue and way too loud. Am I hungover? Why am I sitting in the center of a perfect circle, unmarred by the forest surrounding?
- 4. No, I... I can't be sure that I'll remember all the choices I made.

 I know I won't remember them, so I'll just make the same ones again and again and again.

Do you wish to proceed?

- 1. Yes
- 2. No Do I have a choice?

You're here to find something, but you've gotten lost. The sun has set, and your phone is dead. You forgot what you came here for, but it was important. Her name sits empty on your lips, like the ghost of honey on your tongue. Do you wish to proceed?

1. No, of course not. Why would I want to leave? I'm exactly where I want to be, the trees are home now. Everything is safe. Everything is alright. You should join us.

- 2. Yes. Yes, I'm confused. Where's my wife? She was here, I know she was. I saw her, so what did you do with her? Where is she?

 don't know where I am. Where is she? Who are you Where is she? There's something in the
- 3. Yes, I followed your directions. I answered your questions. Why do I have to go through this again? If I go with you, will you let me leave? Please, I want to go home.

To the North rises an ocean of wheat, burnished in the light of the moon. It shifts in waves, glinting like silver, but you can see shadows swimming in its depths. To the East sits a forest, dark and black and horrible in its splendor. You see movement in the branches, but the creatures are made of darkness and shadow, and your eyesight was never that great. To the South lie great plains, rolling hills that melt together until the ground looks flat. The moon doesn't cast the shadows it should. The things dancing in the darkness are unburdened by the chains of solidity. There's nothing to the West. You don't look. It smiles to you when you glance away. Which way do you go?

Fractured Psyche

Helen Scullin

LOSE off your eyes, see a beautiful world!
Deafening voices have silenced, dissolved.
Horrors of that world will cease to resolve,
Weave a new way with the borders unfurled.

Close off your mind, live an unconscious dream! Ink blots in darkness as death drives your sleep, Repress the real till the limbo's too steep, Nightmares in new worlds will seldom be seen.

Fantasy: what's inside?
Mirrored sea, worlds aligned.
Ego-fueled latency
In a cruel reverie.

Thoughts of doubt: manifest.
Breathe it out, know what's next.
Neonate, woken Zen.
Empty slate, start again.

Break free from the fulfillment of paracosms:
Paradoxical pursuits of placid peace.
Lotuses lay rotten when a fabricated truth blossoms,
Enlightenment is endless when you let wishes release.

MANASTASH

Turning eyes within a mind of anxiety
Answers spurned from anima are essential.
Minds repulsed by truth exist in spurious society,
Awaken to reality—pursue your potential!

Fractaling Futures

Lesli Saige Johnson

have lived a thousand lives a thousand unseen worlds versions of me that exist through time ripples and shattered mirrors every choice spawns new realities endless possibilities spiraling out of control and into infinity fractals of futures

There is a me that is married several years ago now wed to the missionary I emailed in high school still church-going probably pregnant with baby #2 temple worthy a proud member of an institution

Even further back a me with parents still together A version where she never cheated instead stayed with dad I never had an alcoholic stepdad an understanding stepmom No stepsiblings added to the fold I never learn their names So much pain and suffering with the power of hindsight could have been avoided but with its erasure lessons too would be lost to time I must ask myself could I give up what I have now to change what was then

I dreaded the unforgiving
nature of missed opportunities
what chances would come my way
unable to be taken
my captor sharing the same face as
me
having chosen
regret being my truest and worst
fear
I am my enemy

But perhaps instead of floating through wary waters drifting through possibilities that may have been but aren't I can ground myself in what I do know now the world in which I live can have a me That is simply me

Earless

Vicky Wilkinson

'M curled up, fetal, wasting to decay.

The door locks me in, the candlelight fades away.

Rid me of the noise—shut it off, hide it away.

Let me sleep—just one day.

No.

No, no.

No-

seal the walls, cut off the outside, take the blanket, cover my eyes.

I won't leave this room.

I won't.

Scab.

Scab, scab,

Scab...

I don't want to hear it.

No longer.

Stop knocking at the door.

Faith in the Dark

Vicky Wilkinson

would never wish my life upon you.
Even after stitching these wounds,
watching them close.
I wouldn't, no.

Breathe.

Breathe in the air of life.

But where would it take me?

Where would it take me?

The chilled breeze runs across my face.

I think I'd like to stay in this empty place.

Hollow hills, unfilled corridors,
all for endless days...

You can stay for today.

Light, through the gloom, will glow even in the grey
For now, lay down on this hazy day.
Hush, be still, save for a few subtle coughs.
And let the wind move,

With the spirit it carries off.

And the world you knew may crumble in aghast, all that you love, scattered in the blast.

But don't let the wreckage hold you still.

Don't let a shadow steal your path.

And let not guilt sway your sails astray.

Set your course ahead, bold and true abray.

Wallow no longer in the space of unknown—

But rise, rise, and go.

Monument

Vicky Wilkinson

HE vines shrivel, the moisture... bare. Fields blacken, with ash falling everywhere. I'm so happy to see this place burn. So happy to watch it burn, to watch it go—all I ever wanted.

But when I look, really look, it burns.
It's so bright.

I've held the torch of a funeral fire, watched the flames climb higher, higher. And when the cinders cooled, when the day bled red to gray, it cooled to an ashen grave—my monument.

The day grows black, fog approaches, and with it—quiet.

Why?
What now?
I didn't have to.

The Garden

Vicky Wilkinson

IT in the garden, fresh from the rain.
Wait, be still—
let the twilight settle.

Be calm, be kind, hush, let it all go. For when the sun bows low, you'll know—it all passes, all of it, it passes.

In the garden, I find something I find nowhere else—a stillness, nearly never felt.

No worry, no wonder, no weight to bear, only wraiths that drift in the dimming light.

Rest here awhile. Stay as long as you'd like. Let the troubles take root no more, and the green grow ever on.

Even as night unfurls its hush, hear only the breeze, the murmur of streams, and while the spirits linger in the hedges.

Sleep drapes over, soft as ivy at dusk.



Contributors

Sam Atwood

Sam Atwood is a queer poet from Northern Delaware.

Ashley Ayling

Ashley Ayling is a Senior at Central Washington University who is graduating in June with a degree in Professional and Creative Writing. She dabbles in photography and playwriting and hopes you enjoy her work.

Christian Bauer

My name is Ant. As a full-time, online CWU student, the physical community remains somewhat distant, but I haven't let that stop me from attempting to connect. As an author, I much prefer the mundane with a surrealist attitude. From absurdity to obsession, I hope each piece meets you there.

Jordan Cagle

Jordan Cagle is a master's student at Central Washington University in the Professional and Creative Writing program. An English teacher told him that his writing showed promise and he's been chasing that high ever since. He is supported by his wonderful partner, their beautiful child, and too many pets.

Addey Christmann

Addey is an English: Professional and Creative Writing major, working in the welding field, with the goal of having a career in the publishing industry.

Natalie Cullinan

Natalie is a Seattle based creative who finds joy in the melancholy of daily life. Primarily a writer and a fiber artist, she captures moments in photographs and tiny trinkets to tuck away for future inspiration.

Johanna Deletti

Johanna Deletti (she/her) is a hospitality professional, copywriter, and ESL instructor from Boston, Massachusetts. She is in her senior year at CWU online, completing her BA in English with a focus on Professional and Creative Writing. Her inspiration for poetry is derived from her love for travelling the world and studying romance languages. Her literary achievements can be seen through her dedication to the Lion Rock Visiting Writers Series as their Literary Intern from Fall 2024

through Spring 2025. She was published in The Unsealed, a motivational poetic platform that aims to heal and inspire in a collection of self-reflective letters and empowering poetry.

Ella Downs

Ella Downs is a Sophomore at CWU, majoring in English Creative and Professional Writing. She owes her love of words and books to her parents, who were never shy to read their favorite stories to her when she was younger. When she isn't writing, she can be found daydreaming on a walk, baking, or obsessing over some period novel. This is her debut in Manastash, and she hopes you enjoy her work.

Cole Grennan

Cole Grennan is a poet and writer from the Pacific Northwest. Currently in his second year of the Professional and Creative Writing master's program at Central Washington University, he is proud to be part of a thriving literary community. When not writing, he can be found teaching, baking, or pulling his cat's claws out of the curtain.

Lesli Saige Johnson

Lesli Saige Johnson is an artist who likes to create with her head in the clouds. She loves to create complex characters and explore her own identity through poetry. Her highest aspirations are to publish a novel, own a floor-to-ceiling bookshelf, and connect with readers who may relate to her stories.

Ariel Lee

Ari is a transfer student at CWU studying professional/creative writing and history with a minor in anthropology. She is fascinated by language in all its forms and its importance in the study of human history.

Lauren MacDonald

Lauren is a transfer student hailing from the dreary, rain drenched, gloomy west side of Washington. She is currently a senior at Central trying to obtain her bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature plus the Dance for Teaching minor. As a lesbian, her work is infused with sapphic connections and feminine longing, to deliver queer representation that is very much needed. She is also a fan of the horror genre and frequently pens works that spawn terror and nightmares from within a madness riddled mind. If not writing, she can be found working alone at the library, attempting to puzzle through the meaning of life, and trying to finish her novel.

Tonya McMillian

Tonya McMillian is currently a CWU English Literary Studies and Teaching Specialization Graduate student and a previous CWU English Literature and Language Baccalaureate. She is a Divinely inspired passionate writer, poet, and general licensed minister. She writes to share the Word of God and express His love for His creation.

Emily McNealy

Emily McNealy is a senior at Central aspiring to be a writer and an artist. She loves nothing more than to pick up a pen or a paint brush, listen to Tchaikovsky's Swan Lake, and try to tune out the sound of her cats who are begging for treats (again).

Erin Moine

Erin Moine writes fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction. She is currently pursuing an MA in English: Professional & Creative Writing at Central Washington University. Her work has appeared in the Manastash literary journal Volume 32 and The Writing Disorder literary journal. Erin lives in the Pacific Northwest.

Tyler Morello

Tyler Morello (X @tmorellopoetry) is a poet and a senior studying English Education at Central Washington University. Poems from Morello's forthcoming collection, Kid Orchid & The Everlasting Afterparty, center around themes of social belonging, self-image, and the split between the ideal and the real.

Noel Nephew

Noel Nephew is a poet born and raised in Western Washington, and graduated from CWU with a Bachelor's in professional and creative writing in March of 2025. Her work typically centers around themes of self-reflection, identity, and social commentary laced with a bit of venomous humor and sealed with a kiss. She considers her art as an act of rebellion, and she likes it that way.

Lesly Portugal

Lesly Portugal is a third-year student majoring in Biology, Wine, and Business. Passionate about writing, she enjoys crafting stories in her free time. Actively involved on campus, she serves as M.E.Ch.A.'s Social and Cultural Event Coordinator, currently organizing La Pulga, an event celebrating community, culture, and student creativity.

Stella Ramos

Trying to make things happen.

Rachel Riffel

Rachel Riffel is currently in the MA Literary Studies and Teaching program at CWU. She also teaches high school English and Spanish near Spokane, WA.

Anika Saphiloff

Anika Saphiloff is a developmental editor and aspiring translator. Her two photos, Mizu and Natsukashii, were taken last year while studying interlanguage in Japan. The pieces are dedicated to her baby son who made the epic journey with her in utero and is due to arrive this summer.

Helen Scullin

Helen Scullin is a junior student pursuing majors in both Japanese and English Professional and Creative Writing. Currently enrolled in her first-ever poetry class, she aims to create works both surrealist and complex for readers to deeply analyze and immerse themselves within.

Viktor Volkov

Viktor Volkov is an author from Bainbridge Island, WA. He writes horror and satire, but enjoys dabbling in other genres. When not writing, he coaches new authors and hosts workshops on craft. Viktor is published in several journals online and in print. He has recently finished revising a 7 volume urban fantasy novel, and is planning to finish his Bachelor's at CWU in 2026. Apparently, he also takes pictures...

Vicky Wilkinson

I come from a small town in western Washington, I've always loved the art of poetry. I seek to paint pictures with words, as well as use those same words to bring about certain melancholic atmospheres.

Masthead

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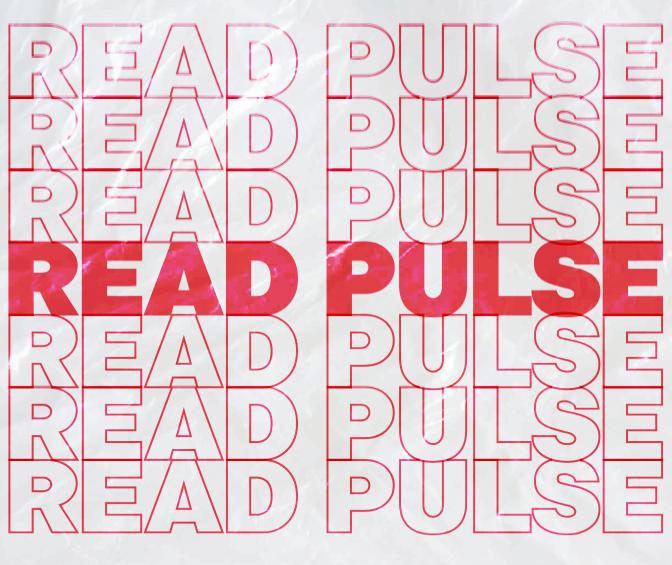
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