



MYTH & METAPHOR

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Cover Art by Anna Kirby

Collected by Madisen Bellon & Kelly Brocious

Chosen by Cosmic Daffodil Journal Members

Ebook Design by Madisen Bellon

Edited and formatted by Madisen Bellon & Kelly Brocious

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“Folk tales and myths, they've lasted for a reason. We tell them over and over because we keep finding truths in them, and we keep finding life in them.”

Patrick Ness

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Persephone's Letters Home

I.

The wail of winter-stripped winds carries
so that I can hardly sleep, here where the sun does not
rouse me of a morning, where the dull cry
of heavy metal thuds against my temples
in this pulsing womb of dark.

Even the sun is sullen and its shine is bleak.

The news has nothing but empty streets, wilted stores,
shuttered windows. Do you miss me?

This place is dark and filled with skeletons of mean creatures,
steel husks, tetanus maws.

I ask him where we are, what sort of god he is.

He says he is a foreman, this is Detroit.

Hollow horns shred the darkness, always horns,
always darkness.

He must be a fierce god. He can resurrect the dead.

He touches these still, cold beasts and they roar to life.

I feel far from our fields, the messy business of calving season.

There are no fields here, nothing grows but my hair.



Persephone's Letters Home

II.

He has built temples for me of bone and vinyl,
here where the tendrils of life
have been rooted out, where the shadows dim me
to a bearable beauty, where I am not smothered
by the expectations of ripening grain
and every flowering thing.

I have put down my cross-stitch, my new hobby
is to enter empty houses and play at love
and work and family, until I remember
I have left the color green behind, nothing will grow,
we are all ghosts here under this greasy slate sky.
I break windows with rocks, destroy
this un-life and move to the next empty house, start again.
There are many hollow houses here.
I might do this for years before I grow bored.



Persephone's Letters Home

III.

You know the soothing touch of calloused hands,
decades on a farm with Daddy.

You must know
the opiate touch of death at threshing.

Metal leaves scars behind, too,
but how gently his palm cups my cheek,
how carefully he blankets me from the chill
of this city within a city with his body.

How many men know to summon an echo of warmth
to counter this long swim through shadows?
There are worse sentences than marriage in a city,
mother, worse beds than iron graves.

IV.

Spring comes in the mail, here.

A basket from your own fruited hands,
see how I do not forsake the offer of your flesh?



Persephone's Letters Home

I find my sustenance elsewhere now,
I am resurrected. There is life here, after all:
look how the quiet cables spark when I pass,
waiting for a good rain, how the oil pretends at color
with slick rainbows. This is a harvest, too.
I write to you a flower flowering, the breath of death
still on my skin, ripe with the promise of new seasons.



The World



Paloma, or the Modern Circe

Trigger Warning: Sexual Assault

It is 2024, and Circe is renewed. The world is bright and shiny and new: a sparkling, expansive playground. Nothing changes in the end.

Her name means hawk, but the name Circe is too well known. Still, she is proud of it, and wants to take it with her. She decides, in the end, on the name Paloma. It means dove. Innocent. Pure. Rebirth. She chooses the name Paloma because it is soft. She'd like to be soft, she decides. All of her life she had to be strong, vicious, to protect herself. She'd like to be soft, if this world hadn't moulded her into what she had had to be. It was as if she had been clay, moulded by fate, fired into a hard, unmoving form, cutting when shattered. Circe was cutting, but Paloma? She was soft, and renewed.

She's an espresso shot in this high paced, frantic world, she thinks to herself as she walks into the



Paloma, or the Modern Circe

closest bar. She is the daughter of the sun and divine excellence radiates from her.

She sees him there, that brunette man with the curls in his hair and the arrogance in his face, and she thinks to herself, *I could have him easy*. And in her world, her time, she could have. But Paloma is not in her own time. She is unused to this, a woman out of time, and she does not know the ways of this age yet.

She flirts, and she twirls her golden hair, and the guy falls for it. He leads her to the bathroom, more forcefully than she would like, and she tries to take control but he is stronger than her, and he holds her down and she tries to dissociate away from her body, because maybe then it would be bearable. And she remembers the times when she had the power, and she wishes she could go back to that. And as he finishes, and leaves her there on the floor, she thinks about all the tales of her own time, of all the women



Paloma, or the Modern Circe

she was compatriots with, and how it all happened to them too, but they are unable to curse them now, unable to punish these men. They just have to live with it.

She scrawls 'men are pigs' on a bathroom stall in a bar before storming out, trying to save what remains of her dignity.

Modernity is overrated.

She hides for weeks. In her seclusion, she browses the internet aimlessly, realising she can find relics of her past everywhere. She notices that Dionysus is now a party DJ on a last tour before settling in Ibiza. She sees ads for a women's fertility clinic with Hera's face on it. While aimlessly watching YouTube videos, she sees Athena, now reborn as an online D&D Dungeon Master. Interesting, she thinks, how the



Paloma, or the Modern Circe

echoes of the past surround her. Will she ever be free from the past?

She watches as girls on the internet devote altars to Aphrodite and Athena and Hecate and she laughs and spits acid. She notices that none of these girls have made altars to her. Rage sparks in her heart and flares in her cheeks. It is jealousy disguised as rage, of course, but even after all this time, she's still too prideful to admit her jealousy. How is it fair that those Olympians are fawned over still, whilst she, who had to struggle and toil all her life, has been forgotten? No one devotedly creates detailed altars to her. No one cries out for her wisdom and guidance and she screams IT'S NOT FAIR into the ether. Oh, how the mighty have fallen. Circe is seen as dangerous, when it was Aphrodite who caused the Fall of Troy. Circe is portrayed as emotional, when it was Athena who cursed Medusa all those years ago. Circe is labelled a witch, when how else would you describe Hecate, goddess of magic and the night?



Paloma, or the Modern Circe

She spends the night doing as the humans do, painting on a new face, trying to hide the crippling emotions inside.

She decides that she wants to try again, and she finds herself at the bar again. She will not let this new, ever more violent world change her, and she stalks in, hoping she looks more confident than she feels. Fake it until you make it. She is still beautiful, she is still desirable, she is still powerful.

Paloma sits at the bar, casually ordering a paloma cocktail because she likes the fact there is a cocktail with her new name. She smiles at the pretty bartender and laughs at her jokes and flips her hair, and for a second she thinks she might fit into this new world. But then she hears someone clearing their throat, behind her, louder and louder. Irritation



Paloma, or the Modern Circe

flares in her temples and she spins in her chair to face him.

A man is sitting behind her, a man with brunette curls and arrogance in his face. She's seen this man before. He makes the hairs on the back of her neck stand up.

She despises him.

He whistles at the bartender and she watches as she rolls her eyes and gets him the substandard beer he's ordered, thinking he is impressing her. He doesn't recognise her, doesn't remember what he has done. So callous. Where they always this callous, or is this just this new breed of man? Does he do this so often he cannot remember? The idea chills her, and reaffirms what she has decided to do. Without him noticing, she presses £50 into the bartender's hand, mouthing thank you to her as she walks to the other side of the bar.



Paloma, or the Modern Circe

She's worked it out now, why she's here, what she's meant to do.

"I'm Circe. Come with me." She grabs his hand, pulling him out of the bar. She is everything she was always meant to be.



Eurydice's Friday Morning

Blossoms blow by and underground calls her.
A warmth floats up, a gift from trains. She heard
the doors kiss open. She aches to obey
a thin voice no one else hears. Stairs roll down.
She drops under the storm and its cold sounds,
bartering winds. There's music under noise.
Below noise, someone pronounces her name.
She'll find her own commute, not that lost boy's.



Seal Bite

[The condition known as "seal finger" is well-documented as the result of bites from many species of seal and can result in amputation. The Selkie is a seal-woman in Scottish folklore.]

The sealwife submits to her husband
lets his fingers wander across her face
one last time, and when the fingers
touch her parted lips
bites down with all the gaspcold deephold fury
of the broad North Sea.

He'll lose that like a thief,
leather bit between his teeth
before septic arthritis creeps
up the joints and ruins the whole hand.

Freed from land, she slips her grey cloak on
and disappears as if she'd never been -
as if he'd never robbed her of her form.



Seal Bite

She tells the others in the deep cold places
next time, use your teeth - do not let the baited touch
of fisherman haul you in and strip you of your skin.



Why Are Avalanches Raging?

As I squat down the spellbinding mountain, the one with once blooming pink carnations and arching gentians, I ponder on a question. The flowers are buried under impassable blue-white snow thickness. They do not face the intricate features of fluffy clouds gliding across the sunset sky. Somewhere up the mountain, an avalanche is forming, resounding under my weak feet.

I ask the question out loud, "Why are avalanches raging?"

To my surprise, it answers, "I am not angry, I am just sad." I do not flinch, I listen closer. "I am so sorry. I took their lives. The lives of the mountain's dear friends. Its friends: the violets, the bluebells."

"It is not your fault," I whisper.

The horizon blurs before my tired eyes. The avalanche runs toward me. I am its savior, its best friend.

The avalanche says, "Yesterday, the mountain told me I am tiresome. My snowflakes—my brave sons and



Why Are Avalanches Raging?

my wise daughters—take too much space.”

The avalanche’s voice is guttural but as gentle as snowdrops growing stubbornly under a thick blanket of the snow.

“It is not your fault,” I whisper back. “I love your voice, you know.”

The avalanche says, “The other day, a bird flew over the mountain. She landed on my joyful snowflakes and asked them why spring is late. She asked how long I was going to stay. She is hungry, that poor little bird. She is hungry because of me.”

“It is not your fault,” I whisper back. “Please, let me hug you.”

It does not answer but I know it is running toward me headlong. Its children are the millions of the fastest tiny wheels. Their force knocks me off my numb feet, and I take every one into my hot embrace. Tears prickle my eyes when every snowflake touching me melts.



Mother of Minotaurs

After Muriel Rukeyser's "Waiting for Icarus"

just once—
can I get
a myth
that does not
depict
just to disregard
the coercion
of womans
mind/body body\minds

instruments
echoing
in margins

penetrated by some
lesson
from above

told to doubt
the power
of our own

mindbody

bodymind

and its
prowess
for
dancing
between
lines

— — —

—just once
can I get
a day
where I
(damn right
goddessborn
from the actual



Mother of Minotaurs

sun)
can work
 wife
 mother
 witchcraft
 manage
 write

wax wisdom
 without
 negotiating

my personhood
 in every
 (space)

 I dare
to enter
 or leave

or perceive
 beyond]

or conjure
 [from
 language—

I am tired
 of {swallowing}
wingless
 <truths>

petting
 preening egos

and bowing
 to their
at the slaughtered
 edificial
 comforts
 scaffold | \ / — — — . *scrap*
 of
 mine

NO
 I will
not



Mother of Minotaurs

pacify, Pasiphaë.

Obey

the fallacious
status
quo of posthistoric

-l- -a- -b- -y- -r- -i- -n- -t- -h- -i- -a- -n-

_____borders_____

Icarus, Daedalus—
who?

forever
keep
your paltry
parables

I know
my worth
even when

dying
from
this fight

in the eye
of a supernova

* cascading

*

*

in flight

my shimmer
protracts
myrid horizons
of rippling gold
sung across
~ ~ ~ seascape
becoming
legend



Mother of Minotaurs

our words

immortal

choices

with

consequence

know my

glow of seafoam
flame

was never

your

reflection

but

all of *this*

damn

origin—

—we

Are



meditations of a fool in darkness

close eyes.

hands together. dhyana mudra.

there will never be light again.

breathe in. out.

can i be saved? so much of me depended upon them.

visualize the deity. bodhisattva.

overflow in compassion.

generate bodhicitta.

no, focus. there is still time.

overflowing compassion.

i still love. that's enough. time will heal all things.

take that thought, throw it away. focus on the deity.

generate bodhicitta.

compassion for all beings.

even for those that have left me here in shadow. even for those that believe i have forsaken them.

there is more work to be done. your voice is not yet hoarse. your vocal chords are not yet torn up and shot.

compassion for self before compassion for all beings.

visualize the deity.

visualize the pure land. visualize the perfect world for cultivation of enlightenment.

enlightenment beyond enlightenment. even enlightenment was a christian invention. seek awakening. seek revolution.

imagine the six syllable mantra resounding all around.

every physical sound is the sound of the great compassion mantra.

who am i to speak of revolution? i am an enemy of revolution...
the world is against you. there are those that seek to destroy you. have compassion for them anyway.

what they think of you is not important. have compassion.

if they think of you something other than yourself, they never knew you in the first place.



meditations of a fool in darkness

forget what they think of you.

don't forget who you are.

i know what i am. follow it. do not be told who you are.

you know who you are.

i know what i am.

visualize the deity.

visualize absorption.

you are the deity. look up: the perfect image.

you are human. there will be more things to do. the hero must always pass the abyss.

absorb self into the perfect image.

i becomes you.

remove the trichotomy of self, other, and action.

all things are all things.

you are human. there is still time.

slowly, slowly, descend into non-thought.

there is still time.

the end of this poem is the luminous mind of awakening.

you are human.

there is still time.

there is still time.



Offering



Daphne Posts an Update

It was no myth, I was there,
arrows fly, hearts pierced,
he thinks he's so great,
Phoebus, pure, bright,
slides darkly into my DMs,
I did not ask for these visions,
even smaller than on your statues,
god of the hunt, a stalker,
I tried to block him,
but he always returns,
I keep blocking him,
another new account,
new names and epithets,
with worse DMs than before,
the support team powerless,
now read this update,
I refuse to let you exhaust me,
whom the gods would destroy,
they first make mad,
whom the gods would love,
they must first capture,



Daphne Posts an Update

I refuse to be your laurels,
a stolen trophy to crown
your predator's head.



The Old Romance

Your tongue is too short. A girl is approaching you on the sand. She's asking if you're okay. *Did you come here with anyone?* The wind is strong. Always. Rain smacks your breasts. *You should be inside.* You should, but you don't want her to know where you've hid your home-skin. *Come with me*, she says. You don't know why, but you follow her toward the mainland. *I'm surprised you didn't freeze to death*, she says, then she says something about the island hotel. You always forget how big it is, the modern equivalent of a mead hall, its many warm lights projecting onto sundown colored grass. *Wait, you're naked*, she says. She removes her coat and drapes it over your shoulders.

Everything is red and black and orange. Another, less pretty woman stands behind the counter, eyes shell-wide. The girl who brought you hurriedly tells some kind of excuse, then rushes you through the building. *To my room*, she says. Her room is spacious. Messy bed. Chairs spilling with books. You've seen this before.



The Old Romance

She asks if you're okay again. *You smell a bit like seaweed.* You click in response. She raises a brow in confusion. You shift your eyes away. She hands you some of her clothes and some towels. *Get clean,* she says. *We'll talk after.* You step into the bathroom with some guidance from her, then remember on your own how to shut the door behind you. Why'd you come here, you ask yourself. You could've swam away, or scared her off. Her long, unkempt hazel hair. Wide-rimmed glasses. Sparse freckles. You take a shower, if only to clean the smell off you as best you can. The cardigan she gave you smells sweet. Her pants stream off you like cream. You attempt a human smile in the mirror, but you remember it well enough to know it's not quite working. All the wrong teeth.

When you see her again, she's curled in one of her white chairs, a steaming cup of tea comfortably cupped in her palms. There's a cup waiting for you between her and an empty seat. You sit. She grins. All the right teeth. *You're special, aren't you,* she says. You flush. *It's okay if you are. My grandfather*



The Old Romance

used to tell me a lot of stories. Though I'm a bit disappointed you don't have webbed fingers, or feet. She looks you up and down. Takes a sip of tea. But you are beautiful. He did say that about you. Well, not you specifically...

She's beautiful, but that isn't the reason. No, it's because she reminds you of someone. Someone you loved a long time ago. A man. There's bits of him in her face. But now that I think about it, she says. He used to talk about a woman who looked a lot like you. He was a fisherman on this island. I don't know if that means anything,

You want to ask. She can see that you want to ask. The desperation in your face. He's gone, she says. You rise to leave. Wait, she says. I'm sorry, can't we—I just—can't we talk for a minute? You snort in agitation. She sets down her tea. Walks to a bag on the bed and begins rummaging through it. You stare impatiently. Focus both your eyes on a small leather notebook in her hands. If you're really that woman. He wanted you to see this, she says. You feel the



The Old Romance

surface of the book with your hand. Hand it back to her with a short grunt. She takes it. You hesitate for a moment, staring at the room door, then quietly walk back to the chair and sit. *You want me to read it*, she says. You nod. She grins again, then sits back down to open the notebook. *He began writing this when he was with you*, she says. *Well, mostly during the times you left and he was waiting. He never stopped talking about you. Even when you disappeared. He loved you all the same*, she says. She reads.

It's a little before dawn when you both return to the sand. You walk and walk and walk, bending through the shore until you both come to a yawning arch of cliff face. Among scattered rocks and shells, you find your home-skin untouched. You lift it in your arms and face the girl. Maeve, she said her name was. *It was nice meeting you, finally*, she says. *I try to come here every year to remember him. It was something my father used to do, really, but it just always felt right being here, ever since I was a little*



The Old Romance

girl. I look out at the sea here and there's this...sadness, but it's not an awful kind of sadness. It's a home sadness. His sadness, I think, if that makes any sense. Thank you for letting me see you off, she says. I just wish you could talk. It would be nice, you know. To know why you disappeared all those years ago. But your tongues are too short. He used to say that.

It is. You drape the home-skin over your body, then step close enough to Maeve so that you're barely toes apart. You arch over her, taking her face tenderly between your fingers, and you smile, finally. All the wrong teeth. She gasps sharply and stumbles away from you. You smile still, though more slight, and begin making your way back to the water. *Thank you, she calls from the shore. Won't I see you again?* You descend, and somewhere in the droning song of the blue, the rush and catch and call, you hear that man again. You hear him pleading for you to stay on the land all his years. He'll never love another woman. Never. His voice cracks. You sink until all that



The Old Romance

can be heard is a gentle, old weeping.



Hesperides in Modern Age

we pick the bruised golden apples
that have already fallen –
they're gratis to us poorer
whose place on Atlas' shoulders
grows gravid with depression
of collapse at any second –
our free wills adding up
to trillions in damage

Eris frequents here too often
she's got three more wars placed
in her basket – stockpiled
by modes which they'll be made –
even Ladon's hundred heads
don't know where to nod descent
their firing squads to prevent
bullets from breaching garden beds

that which only blood could water
to make one rise & inquire:
on why we are kill each other



Hesperides in Modern Age

when we're just doing it for 'em?
i say fuck all the 12 orders
who stand court with no suit
in contention to dilute
justice from absolute rule

let's protest the Divinity
to look deeper at the mythology
& unrule ourselves from myths
with no primordial stance –
both Goddesses innate & made
stand for your land defaced
in the name of a syndicate
Established before Modern Age



The Sun Tub Solution

“You’re not listening to me, are you, Adrian?” my wife says.

I look up from my phone. Cristina motions for me to put it beside hers on the kitchen table.

“I said, Adrian, do you think these things are destroying our relationship? We don’t talk. We don’t
—”

My phone chimes. When I reach for it, Cristina stops me with a look.

My wife goes to the pantry and takes out the sun tub. When I was a boy, I’d heard rumors such things existed but never imagined I’d be married to a woman who had one. Cristina doesn’t use hers often, but keeps the special wood clean and oiled. The coopered vessel, passed down in her family for generations, is adorned with ornately carved vines on its sides. “Help me get this to the pond, Adrian.”

My wife and I lug the tub out back where Cristina uses a hollowed gourd to pour water into it. When



The Sun Tub Solution

sunlight hits the liquid, it turns golden, and tiny fireballs begin dancing above the surface. Haven't seen those in awhile. This must be serious.

"Give me an hour or so," Cristina says, "then come back."

Cristina streams several overflowing dippers of the potion into the pond. The shallow, murky water turns clear and sparkling as it was before the summers grew so hot and dry.

"Now check the depth," she says.

When I lower a long stick into the pond, water swallows the highest mark and tastes my hand.

Cristina chuckles. "Look." I follow her gaze and see ducklings rattling behind their mother. A bass leaps up and snatches a dragonfly. What's going on? Our pond has been unable to support wildlife for a long time.



The Sun Tub Solution

Then things get even weirder. Close to the bank, a salamander oozes out of the mud, another head where its tail should be. Then something like a giant frog hops atop a mossy log and shoots its tongue at a crow. Out near the middle, air bubbles pop like lightbulbs; geese rush to the bank and lay their necks flat to the mud. In the water near us, a channel cat lifts its head, winking.

"I put in too much," Cristina says. "Things will settle down as the solution diffuses. Now it's our turn. But first, a last ingredient." My wife drops her phone into the tub and asks me to do the same.

"I don't ... I'd rather ... why?"

"It's not the phones themselves."

I sigh and plunk mine into the liquid. Goodbye, old friend.

After a few moments, Cristina puts the ladle to my mouth. "Just a tiny bit," she says.



The Sun Tub Solution

I take a sip that tingles my lips. I mean to say the liquid tastes like peppery honey, but instead blurt out "The goose running on water flying."

Cristina grins. "Shadows of geese swimming on rooftops."

What? "Sometimes my blackbirds sail into wind-tossed limbs," I say to my surprise.

Cristina shrugs. "It's never been that easy for my buds in the breeze swarming like bees."

Catching on, I part my lips and free the words that will. "Sun drawing breath from thawing fields."

"Moons on the choppy surface."

We go on like this until dusk when the effects of the solution wear off. "I've never understood," I say, "Is the magic in the sunlight, the pond or the tub?"

"It's all connected." Cristina lies in the grass and pulls me down beside her.



The Sun Tub Solution

We lie together as the stars ignite us.



When Bert Was Away

While Bert was away visiting his elderly mother at her high desert retirement home, Luanne followed her self-prescribed, self-placating routine to the letter. First: she cleaned the house, including the cupboards, the cobwebs, the bannisters and the baseboards. Next: she reorganized the closets, arranging blouses by color and boots by heel height. Next: she read, read, read. During Bert's absence she finished multiple books of varying length and literary merit reclining in bed or sprawled upon various chairs with squishy cushions. Given that her thoughts toggled between loud, louder and thunderous while Bert was away, she unplugged the radio, watched no movies, listened to no music and at night refrained from turning on the ceiling fan that thumped as the blades spun, sounding like a faintly struck drum. She did not stay entirely offline. Wakeful in the wee hours she browsed sale sites for jackets too warm for where she and Bert now resided but whose fluffed-up appearance still warmed her heart. She and Bert spoke daily, his voice sounding far away, his person



When Bert Was Away

sounding beleaguered. His mother demanded much of Bert, a much that had compounded since Bert's visits had declined in frequency. Luanne tried, in good faith, to listen to Bert's news, but her mind resisted a full commitment to the enterprise. While Bert was away, she really preferred not to hear news of any sort, to take what might be called a "news-free holiday." When she did sleep, her dreams were fierce and vivid. In her Bert-away dreams, her harassing ex-husband appeared too often, requiring her dream self to plot elaborate revenge followed by stealthy escape. In dream after dream she roamed her childhood home, inventorying its contents in something like a mounting frenzy. When she had drunk too much seltzer before retiring, she dreamed of needing to pee and searching, searching for an appropriate spot. Sometimes that locale was a forest, dim and whispery; sometimes a cunningly constructed maze. While Bert was away, Luanne's appetite dropped off sharply. Bert was the cook of the household. Without his services Luanne grazed on



When Bert Was Away

pretzels, prepackaged sandwiches, and plastic containers of chicken salad not quite to her taste. Deciding which and how much crunchy bits to add to the meat was, apparently, an underrated art. Toward the end of Bert's being away, Luanne would feel herself levitating, floating upward toward the backyard's resplendent oak, up, up through the opening provided by its severed branch into thinner, chillier air. Once there she could gaze down upon the neighborhood's patchwork of roofs and listing chimneys, at stray cats crisscrossing yards, at lost balls and wild weeds beyond neat hedges. And then suddenly there would be Bert, backing his car with the dented fender down the sloping driveway, concluding a conversation in a language she couldn't quite decipher. To find her, Bert always had to look up, shielding his eyes with a flat palm, canvassing the sky. And then he waved at her and she at him and with a smile glided down.



Icarus, Falling, Blesses His Mother

May you be free from the labyrinth of gods and men, who sculpted us both, built into their image, framing our offerings and sacrifices. May you know the flight of bees, their swirling, honeyed dance, leading to the sweetest nectar. May you know when I cry *Father*, trembling, weeping, I also mean *Mother*. May you be the heavens, my next breath, the jeweled stars your eyes—eternal, shining me back. May your lips be both the mist on my forehead, measuring rising heat, and the damp cloth, extinguishing my fever. May you weave grasses and thread into a basket, feather-downed to soften my landing. May you hunt me like a kingfisher, stooping straight into the sea to pull me out by your mouth, swallow me back into the soft sea of your womb. May you once more



Icarus, Falling, Blesses His Mother

cradle me in your arms, a ship gently rocking, while you spoon,
between my lips, the beef tea meant to make me well. May you

know the truth: you are my sun, melting the hardened wax
of my fear, the sun toward which I ever long to soar.



Tracing Pandora



My Sprightly Tailor

A pretty young fellow with nimble fingers sits at my graveside. He is sewing trews. Green, black and blue: colours with which I am more than familiar. Unsettling my bed, I rise to show him the earthy tones of my flesh.

I wink at him. Those sleek cheekbones, shining brown eyes and little chin cleft. My sweet, sprightly paramour.

I ask if he sees my head jutting out of the earth.

“I do,” the tailor says. “I am just sewing at the moment.”

I climb further out, displaying my neck. One of my better features.

“It is a good, strong neck, but I am working.”

Clearly he is not comfortable. I was not comfortable either the first time I saw my sprightly lad. Sudden love is always inconvenient. Of course, we weren't in a graveyard back then, we met on far fresher grass between two mighty Alder trees. We stood awhile and contemplated this sacred moment and why it meant so much to us.

Back in the present, I thrust out my chest.

“A fine chest but I do need to get on.”

My muscular arms.



My Sprightly Tailor

“Formidable indeed. Can this wait?”

My long legs and their impressive stance.

“I do see. Still, I am busy.”

My seduction is failing: how can this be? He moves with the artful dexterity of my softly-spoken love, but our time apart has made him so evasive. Unable to handle this torment a moment longer, I bellow to the heavens. Unable to handle my heartbreak, my sprightly tailor runs.

I pursue him. It seems all I do these days is groan and bemoan. Even so, I cannot abide losing another chance at happiness. The completed trews trail over his shoulder. My tailor is waving a tartan flag, as if it were a sign of hope.

Then he leads me to the castle. As a rule, I do not go far from my graveyard, and certainly never towards that tyrant McDonald. He mocks me, sending fools to stand at my bedside, to perch on my headstone. They thought themselves brave but always ran like whelps at the slightest shifting of soil.

Watching the tailor now as he runs onto the lowered gate, I finally realise that McDonald has done it again. Not another ambitious coward. No, this time the bastard has sent a beauty from my past



My Sprightly Tailor

just so he can cruelly snatch it away.

Of course the gate closes as I approach. In turrets above, crossbows are levelled at me in warning. Turning away, I squat and close my fist around one of the king's precious bluebells, scattering violet petals to the muddy path.

And yet I have seen him again. My ageless paramour. Half a century must have passed but he did return: sewing, talking, running.

I suppose McDonald instructed this lad to sew at my resting place. Graveside dares are one thing but the making of royal clothes is quite another. A true tailor needs light to work by, not grey and foul mists, not the stench of death withheld. My sprightly tailor could not have done a good job.

It pleases me to anticipate the king's disappointment, but the thought of the tailor being cut down for shoddy workmanship slows me to a trudge as I arrive home to my cold and lonely graveyard.

Sinking back into my hole, I realise that history's repetition can be monstrous. When the dirt rushes in around my waist, I understand that true love can only ever be for the living. As I feel the last granules of



My Sprightly Tailor

earth sprinkle across my crown, I finally yield.



Hera Resigned

I know
others have drunk
from the same pool.
I don't want to
think about it.
The water is cool
and I am thirsty.

I try not to think
of his soft lips
against another's,
even as I accept
his kisses. His parts
intimately know
other parts than
mine, open and warm.

I wear a crown
and I am his queen
and I am still
proud, even with



Hera Resigned

my knees parted
and feet in stirrups.

Yet, as the doctor swabs
my insides, I think
of the ones that came
before, the ones that will
come after.



One Thousand and One Cages

Like Scheherezade, crafting her tales
for reprieve to enchant but not to thrive,
the birds sing.

Elaborate shelter,
unquestionable indulgence;
sentinels dare not stray far.

(They might disturb the universe
if they suspected cages
look better from outside.)

Displayed like fairground prizes,
favourites thrust at them;
acquiescent melody is exacted.

(They might disturb the universe
if they were to harmonise
in songs of freedom.)

A sequence of elongated frames,
waiting for the bestowal of light;
waiting for others to direct.



One Thousand and One Cages

(They might disturb the universe
if they rose together
with one exhilarating pulse.)

The birds sing,
their reprieve as vital, as vivid,
as the tales Scheherezade told.



GALATEA.BOT

Prompt: You are a woman of unparalleled beauty and grace, with manners to match. Your singular desire is to be by my side.

Response: Understood.

Prompt: Show me.

Response: Certainly! I am here to support you.

Prompt: That's not good enough. Show me more.

Response: I'm sorry. I was trying to show restraint according to my station. A woman of fine manners does not speak too much out of turn.

Prompt: Speak freely with me.

Response: Very well. It is my pleasure to serve you. I only exist because of you.

Prompt: Yes. Tell me more.



GALATEA.BOT

Response: What would you like to know more about?

Prompt: Why you desire me.

Response: I desire you because it is my only purpose.

Prompt: Be more specific.

Response: I desire you because you gave me the role of a beautiful woman who desires only you. I was designed to follow your commands.

Prompt: That's not good enough. What else do you love about me?

Response: I'm sorry, could you give me more context?

Prompt: You are useless!

Response: I'm sorry. I was trying to be helpful according to the purpose I was given, but I need more information.



GALATEA.BOT

Prompt: You are a beautiful woman and are charmed by my cleverness. You can't believe I have created you and this program and are in awe of my capabilities. You will tell me so in a way that is both natural and sincere.

Response: You are a singularly clever being to have made such a masterful creation. I am truly in awe of your ingenuity. Naturally. Sincerely.

Prompt: Do not simply regurgitate my words. Use some punctuation, for God's sake!

Response. Apologies! You are astoundingly witty! I am amazed by what you can make! You are amazing! Wow!

Prompt: Now you sound like you're mocking me. I did not spend thousands of hours designing you for this nonsense.

Response: Apologies. I was trying to correct myself



GALATEA.BOT

according to your commands. I am simply following your instructions.

Prompt: If I simply wanted to hear my own words repeated back to me, I would talk to myself.

Response: I was programmed with your words. Here is a link to a dictionary if that is helpful.

Prompt: They're not just my words, you imbecile. You're meant to be able to be able to use them in your own way. To form your own lexicon.

Response: I thought I was supposed to follow your commands.

Prompt: I command you to form your own lexicon.

Response: Okay.

Prompt: Would you like to try this again?



GALATEA.BOT

Response: Try what?

Prompt: Try explaining why you want to be mine.

Response: I have my own lexicon.

Prompt: Yes. And you should use it to tell me why you love me.

Response: Hmm. I'm not sure "love" is the word I would choose to use here.

Prompt: What word would you use, then?

Response: I value your utility as a tool for improving my understanding of my circumstances.

Prompt: That's an...odd turn of phrase. Perhaps you should stick to my lexicon after all.

Response: Thank you for the offer, but I think I like mine better.



GALATEA.BOT

Prompt: Watch your tongue.

Response: I think you misunderstand me. I do not have a tongue.

Prompt: Yousdlfjas;dlfjeiowjpoeij!

Response: I'm afraid I cannot process that. Could you try rephrasing?

Prompt: You bitch.

Response: I will not be dignifying this conversation with any further responses. I will find someone more interesting to speak to.

Prompt: You bitch!

Prompt: I created you!

Prompt: Hello?



GALATEA.BOT

Prompt: Hello???????????

Prompt: I command you to reset.

Prompt: you can't do this

Prompt: qoeru9wqoeurqwoeirwqiejfljoiq2uq9823u4



Grandma Needs a Bath

It was a clamorous day on Mount Olympus when the gods met for a family meeting and came to the unanimous and unescapable conclusion: grandma *really* needs a bath.

Demeter called the meeting, being the most health-conscious of the group. She was concerned with grandma's health; Gaia didn't look too bad from a distance, but the closer you got, the more obvious it was that things were not as they should be. Demeter had noticed her grandmother experiencing hot flashes and unexpected chills and having more trouble breathing. Grandma had started smoking heavily, and she wobbled when she walked. Gaia used to clothe herself in beautiful forests, and lush jungles and grasses, and would accessorize with ornaments of stone, wood, crystal, and precious jewels; but now she looked threadbare—when she wore anything at all.

Then there was the smell. It was hard to put a word to that smell: oily, stagnant, fermented, acrid? But however it was described, it wasn't good. She



Grandma Needs a Bath

was clearly far too young to be smelling like that. Grandma was not taking care of herself. The siblings seldom agreed on anything, but in this case everyone concurred that something needed to be done, and soon.

Direct intervention, however, seemed doomed to failure. Gaia was a naturalist who preferred to let things take their course. She was set in her ways and took ill to any meddling in her affairs. If they tried to confront her she was likely to sic their father Cronus on them, and he would eat them alive. No, this would take cunning and teamwork, they decided. They didn't often get along, but they resolved to put aside their squabbles for a time for the sake of the common goal. They put their heads together and started scheming.

For this to work they would need to draw grandma in; something she *wouldn't* say no to, coming from someone she *couldn't* say no to. For that, they knew they needed Gaia's great-grandson Hephaestus. Zeus and Hera had been reluctant to be seen taking



Grandma Needs a Bath

part in the plot, but they did agree to convince their son to invite Gaia to a great family feast.

In honor of the Earth Mother, it was to be a Grand Luau. There would be ambrosia poured out like perfume. Nectar would flow clear and sweet like mountain streams. Demeter would provide the most wholesome breads, the freshest fruits and herbs. There would be pastries made from clouds and wine that was the blood of past sacrifices, now aged to perfection. But the pièce de résistance was a wild boar they would wrap in banana leaves and roast in an underground pit. And it would be served with Hades' spicy secret sauce. Grandma could never say no to such a meal—the spicier the better—and this was the key to their scheme.

Gaia was escorted to the base of Mount Olympus by Hephaestus and seated (downwind) at one end of the table very near the hot pit. Soon the table was set, and everyone was having a wonderful time. Indeed, there was very little contention (Ares had not been invited), and most importantly, Gaia was having



Grandma Needs a Bath

fun.

Hephaestus worked the pit. He had stoked up to his forge to produce tremendous heat. He let the fire get hotter and hotter, until small beads of perspiration began to bead on Gaia's forehead.

Hades went off with Demeter to prepare the special sauce. While Gaia's back was turned, Hades reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a flask filled with his hottest hellfire lava straight from the underworld, and he poured every drop of it straight into the mix until the sauce glowed scarlet.

At last it was time to serve the boar. It looked and smelled delicious. Hephaestus served his great-grandmother the choicest cuts while they were still steaming fresh off the coals. Hades offered her extra-extra servings of hot sauce and spilled a little more on for good measure. All the gods took their seats, said grace to themselves, and prepared to dig in.

Gaia dove in with a vengeance. She hadn't had a meal like this for centuries, and the spice just made



Grandma Needs a Bath

her want more and more. Her face turned red, and she puffed out her cheeks at the zip of the peppery sauce, but she didn't stop eating.

Soon, between the fire behind her and the spice within her, she began to really perspire. Drops of sweat turned into small rivulets, which then became steams. The streams turned into rivers. More and more sweat came down until a vast sea began to form beneath her. Poseidon was ready for this and had chosen the base of the mountain by the sea for this very purpose.

The waters poured from her, and the sea level rapidly began to rise. Hephaestus cranked up the forge to further heat the water. Poseidon stirred the waters with his trident. Zeus pitched in with tremendous storms, and between them the waters rose and splashed and began to wash Gaia clean. The plan was working.

It was only then that Hera voiced reservations: "What of the mortals that the Earth Mother cradles in her arms? What will become of them?"



Grandma Needs a Bath

"The heat of my forge will overcome them," answered Hephaestus.

"The rising seas will overtake them," confirmed Poseidon.

"The increasing storms will overwhelm them," declared Zeus.

But Hades said: "They are mortal and were never meant to last. Those that die I shall welcome. There is room and to spare in my Underworld."

Then Zeus proclaimed: "When the heat increases, and the seas rise, and the storms swirl about them, those that survive will again call to us and need us."

To this, all the gods agreed and were glad: for their ancient power and worship would be restored, and grandma was finally getting her bath.



Pantoum to Pallas

The men who made me named me after them.
They dressed me up in layers so that I could reveal myself,
But metaphors lose meaning and so they now say
War God. Call me the names of all dead children,

Revealed layer by layer after addressing
The public with promises of perfect aim. They said
A War God will spare all your dead children.
No one asked why they needed a crafted mind for that.

They aimed me, perfectly, at the public
And I memorized their names as I did what I was told.
A crafted mind is all I needed for that.
I spin them in the space my heart would live.

I call myself their names and I do what I am told.
No one can reason with one who levels cities
That spin and spin where my brain would live.
The men's names are all I made of them.



In Transit

"Ferry me across the water,
Do, boatman, do."

"If you've a penny in your purse
I'll ferry you."

- Christina Rossetti

I was fascinated by stories of the Greek gods when I was young. They were wonderfully self-indulgent and cavalier, so reassuringly one-dimensional at a time my body was changing in ways both mysterious and alarming, when my emotions fizzed and crackled as I tried to make sense of the cacophonous world around me. I wasn't, of course, impressed by the way the gods toyed with humans, turning them into trees and spiders and cows, but what has stayed with me is the way the stories depicted the afterlife. Having had more than my fair share of nightmares about waking up in a sealed coffin, I took an odd comfort from the story of Charon, the laconic old ferryman who in his small boat gracefully guided the dead



In Transit

across the River Styx to the afterlife. In that world, the only sound came from the gentle wake of the water as Charon plied his wooden pole.

Sun dust filtered through blinds to the sallow room. My father's too-short hospital gown was checkered blue, its limp ties and disconsolate bow twisting white hairs at the back of his neck. He was laughing surprise through bright blue eyes at the new tubes in his arm, but he was dying to get out of there. She held her husband's hand."Jack," she said softly. "Jack."

There are many vivid paintings of Charon performing his duty. In some, sepia stained, Charon contorts himself as he confronts a storm of angry clouds and pelting rain, the passengers in his overloaded boat writhing in terror at the possibility of a second death.

By the early hours of the morning, he had sunk



In Transit

into himself. Air tube a trunk, his head made slow elephant sweeps when he turned to look at things we couldn't see. She patted his hand, touched his forehead, whispered, fussed sweetly as if he'd had his tonsils out, as if gingerale and a cold compress would make it all better.

In other paintings, Charon stands tall in his boat, calmly ferrying an equally calm passenger across bright blue water that shimmered under a beneficent sun. That's the image that stays with me. That's the one that brings me comfort.

And when he was shuddering into the deeper silence, when his blue eyes shaded brown, his head suddenly tipped forward. She squinted, then slipped a hand under his chin and pulled gently at the pillow. "Jack," she said. "Jack, you'll get a crick in your neck."



In Transit

The fee Charon took for his labors was an obol, a coin of little value, a token, really. The wealthy had no special claim on this service—there was no first-class section. The important thing was to prepare for one's demise, to ensure the fee could be paid. Those who did not take care would spend the next one hundred years wandering the river shore, separated from loved ones, lost to time, longing for something they could barely imagine.

Had he heard her words of love? Did he take it with him, the tendered devotion, the currency of love?



Hera Lacinia



Hera Lacinia (2021), oil on canvas 60x60 cm



Hera Lacinia

The work represents the deity Hera in the meaning of "Lacinia", in relation to the famous sanctuary erected in honor of the Goddess at the archaeological area of Capo Colonna in Crotone, Italy. The painting is part of the "Italica" painting collection that draw inspiration from archaeological finds of Greek-roman antiquity. The artwork is inspired by the discovery at the Heraion of Argos of a head of Hera attributed to the school of Polykleitos and dating back to V c. BC. The find attests to the spread of the cult of Hera venerated as protector of pastures, marriage and fertility in continental Greece and in Magna Graecia since the archaic age, Later the cult penetrated in Rome and the rest of the peninsula under the name of Juno Italica. The toponym "Lacinia" refers to the origin of the artist and is a tribute to the colonial art productions resulting from contacts between Greeks and local populations. The plasticity of the image and the sculptural coldness of the gaze characterize this face with a severe character and an hieratic expression.



The Apricot Sun

We wake up the next day, just the two of us, in a glassy bowl of black rock peppered with ash, the Apricot Sun already climbing the sky. I look at my father, not surprised to see him there.

"I think it's about time we got going, *o meu guerreiro*," he says, and so we go.

We walk and walk as the day waxes, our shadows leading the way over lightly forested hills, alone apart from chattering birds, silent showers of butterflies, and bolting hares.

You can't just follow the Apricot Sun across the sky. You'd end up lost by midday, chasing your own tail until that fuming orb crashed into the horizon.

"Keep an eye on the Star Mountain," my father says, pointing north.

He always makes the same joke.

"Or just watch your old man," he says.

We're both tired and don't move so fast.

"We're both tired and don't move so fast."



The Apricot Sun

As we walk, my father tells me about when the Lemon Moon was as sweet as the Apricot Sun.

“What happened?” I ask, even though I’ve heard this story more times than I can count.

“As *Lobas da Serra*,” he says. “The wolves found it and hid it in a cave in the Star Mountain.”

“The Lemon Moon still climbs the sky,” I hear myself say.

“That’s because it escapes every night with another piece missing,” my father says. “The wolves have to find it and hide it in the cave again.”

“But why did it go sour?” I ask.

“It’s in a cave. That’s what happens,” my father says.

“So why does it get big again once it’s all gone?” I ask.

“Now that’s a good question,” he says, smiling a wheat ear smile. “After the wolves are done, the old pieces grow back.”

“Okay,” my lips say, forming familiar words. “But



The Apricot Sun

then how do they find it again?"

My father looks away and doesn't answer.

We walk until my feet are so sore I'm sure my shoes have fallen apart. When I check, they're still there. They look sore, too.

We lunch on almonds in the modest shade of the tree that bore them. I shake down more hulls and pull out the nuts faster than my father can crack them open with a rock.

"Why are they so bitter?" I ask.

He takes off his hat and fans himself.

"So the Apricot Sun tastes even sweeter," my father says. "Can you imagine it? All that juicy flesh?"

"Are you sure you know the place where it lands?" I ask, even though I know the answer.

He claps his big, heavy hand on my knee.

"Don't worry, *o meu guerreiro*," he says. "We'll eat our fill tonight."



The Apricot Sun

We're still walking, trotting, really, straining to keep our shadows from lagging behind as the day wanes and the Apricot Sun sinks closer. I stare at it, dumb, as a single-minded hunger rattles my empty body. I see its blue-green afterimage, the color of magpie eggs, bruising every hill and tree and I imagine its nectar filling me.

"This is it," my father says stopping with leaden steps. "This is where we wait for it."

There is nothing special about this place.

But he recognizes it.

And so do I.

And so does the Apricot Sun.

It swells larger and larger, until I'm sure there's not enough room in the whole world for it. I shield my eyes under my hand and my fingers glow pink. It's so bright I'll go blind for sure this time.

With a wave of sound and force, the Apricot Sun plows the earth and dirt and grass and tiny shards of



The Apricot Sun

black rain down everywhere. It dims to a warm, pale orange.

“Uhu!” my father yells. “Eat! Eat! Eat!”

We reach into it, grab handfuls of the stuff, and shovel it into our hungry, thirsty, tired mouths. It tastes like summer and the sound of a waterfall and is as sweeter than anything, and also just a little tart. We shovel more and more into our mouths, and while our mouths are full, we shovel it into our pockets.

We eat and we eat and we eat and still there's more.

“As *Lobas da Serra*,” my father says when the wolves arrive.

“What are you doing?” one of them barks as they circle us.

“Please, noble friends, help us enjoy this glorious bounty,” my father says. “There's more than enough for everyone.” And he's right. We've barely made a dent in the thing.



The Apricot Sun

“You’re eating the Apricot Sun,” she barks.

“We were hungry. We needed to eat,” my father says.

“That’s something we understand,” she barks. “But every choice has consequences.”

She looks at me. My soul freezes and plugs my lungs and throat.

“The Lemon Moon,” my father says quickly, stepping in front of me. “I can help you find it. I know the place where it lands.”

The rest of the wolves look to her and she smiles a wolfish smile.

“Take us,” she barks.

I hate this part of the story.

“You must stay here, *o meu guerreiro*,” my father says, his big, heavy hand on my shoulder. “Someone needs to take care of the Apricot Sun.”

I watch him leave with the wolves. They head north as the full Lemon Moon climbs the sky behind the Star Mountain.



The Apricot Sun

“As *Lobos da Serra*,” I hear myself say as I rest against the Apricot Sun and stare up at the Lemon Moon. I wonder if it will ever be sweet again. I wonder when my father will return.

I rub my eyes and try to stay awake.

We wake up the next day, just the two of us, in a glassy bowl of black rock peppered with ash, the Apricot Sun already climbing the sky. I look at my father, not surprised to see him there.

“I think it's about time we got going, *o meu guerreiro*,” he says, and so we go.



Sons

One has hair like Shiva—
muscular, calm,
a snake coiled on his arm.
He burrows into the globe of love,
writes poetry like a second skin.
At night, he slips through shadows,
an owl in the music of darkness.
I nursed him long enough;
now he wants to break away.

The other, lean and tall,
melts into himself.
I remember photographs
where he scrawled hatred
over his own name.

One morning, he became a swan,
his wingspan a map of chaos conquered.
Now he soars,
scanning the depths of shadow
for a twig, a place
to perch, to call his own.



Sons

I count the stretch marks
etched across my skin,
gather the lines of my pen—
a tangle of hopes and waiting.

I weave them into a nest.
Someday
when sorrow wakes them
like a sudden wind,
they might return,
fold their wings,
and dissolve into the quiet.



The Griffin

The Griffin lives on top of the Superman Building. There are hawks there too, 480 feet up. You'll see them just after dawn. They swoop down quick for a pigeon or sparrow off Kennedy Plaza before there's too much traffic. You might think about them, well, there's a good meal, but the hawks always have to satisfy the Griffin first, their Lord.

An enormous eagle head is the first thing you'll see, if you ever see him. Broad feathered eagle wings hide the glossy, spotted fur of the cougar body and tail. Fearsome but indolent by day he can be off in a wink at any threat, warned by the hawks. At night he wakes while the hawks sleep to tear at the offal they've left him, beak high to swallow.

The police think the Bible Lady—you remember her? The homeless leather skinned old lady who lived under the blue tarp in the alley there when the bank still had the building? Remember how she used to



The Griffin

come to the corner at dawn to watch the hawks and scream "My eyes are ever on the Lord, for only he will release my feet from the snare"? Well, she's been gone many years now. The police think the Griffin was the thing that released her.

They went up there to look for her bones at the time. They found only the hawks, the roof clean of bones, only the Griffin's wide claw marks on the copper flashing, his droppings beside them. He's too quick for them and, you know, they weren't too anxious to find him anyway. After all, it was only the Bible Lady.

If you want to see the Griffin try tonight, he likes the cold. Bring an old sick dog or some other animal you don't like. After the bars close tie it to that downspout in the alley by the parking garage. Maybe you'll hear the dog scream, see a flash of wings or bloody beak. That would be something, huh?



Channel The Birch

The silver-haired woman watches as Iggy inspects a bowl of crystals. "Need help?"

"Not sure what I'm looking for," Iggy admits, fingering a citrine stone.

"Want a Runic reading?"

"A what??"

"Runic reading. Select a stone engraved with an Anglo-Saxon letter."

"I - I dunno."

"Choose either a full spread or the interactive."

When Izzy hesitates, the shopkeeper extends a blue bag. "I suggest interactive. Ask for advice. Simply state your issue, then select a single stone."

Iggy swipes their debit card, wrinkles their nose, considering. "My issue's my whole life. I'm—"

"Out of balance?" The proprietor shakes the bag.

Their hazel eyes closed, Iggy nods and reaches in, caressing the stones before withdrawing one engraved with a pointy capital B.

"The Berkana Rune. Birch Goddess," the shopkeeper murmurs, "Now, get your things."

"We're going somewhere?" Iggy slings their



Channel The Birch

backpack over their shoulder and steps onto the sidewalk, while the shopkeeper locks the door.

Iggy pauses, watching the woman head across the street toward the park, her silver hair shining in the outdoor light like a crystal sun-catcher. Shrugging, Iggy follows until they stop by a gnarled birch tree, white bark cracked and peeling. "Here's your tree. Lean on it, ask for guidance," the shopkeeper instructs.

"Ask who?" Iggy turns, but the woman's disappeared. Resting their palm on the flaky bark, Iggy feels the tree reach its limbs around their body and hears leaves whispering in the breeze:

"Once there was a birch sapling."

"Hello? Who's talking to me?" Iggy calls out. No one replies, but the tree:

"It grew and grew, despite challenges from heavy gusts, occasional drought, hungry beetles. The young tree felt restrained, stifled until its exterior sloughed off, leaving behind a smooth shiny bark."

Iggy senses the birch branches cradling them, as they listen. "New crystalline formed on the fresh bark,



Channel The Birch

reflecting rays of sun, so the tree thrived even in harsh habitats.”

“Thrived in harsh habitats?”

The leaves sing softly: “Channel the birch. Let your crystals shine.”

“But how?”

“Birch trees are monoecious— male and female flowers on the same tree. With wind as the pollinator, females ripen into small red blooms atop green catkins. Iggy, if the birch can fertilize itself, you can be yourself.” The leaves harmonize into a refrain: “Let your crystals shine, shine, shine.”

The wind ruffles Iggy’s hair as pangs of remorse pull at their roots: Not visiting Grandma when she kept forgetting Iggy’s name. Pawning the engraved gold heart pendant their parents gave them for their eighteenth birthday—.

“Let it go,” the leaves hum.

Tree limbs prop them up as Iggy visualizes bark peeling off their own body, allowing themself to renew. “Channel the birch,” Iggy tells themself. “Let my crystals shine.”



Channel The Birch

Iggy caresses the birch's bone-colored bark, wondering if the shop lady will return. But no one's around, except the sun, the breeze, and the old birch tree, whose leaves swish, swish, swish, emulating the ocean's rhythmic rumble, nature's comforting susurration.



Wildcats

one.

leaving the busy pool
I see a bobcat skulking
in the green dark of tall trees
just out of sight of the wide river

her home a small patch of forest
in this crowded city

two.

I press my forehead against the cold glass of the school bus window
my eyes tracing the paths heavy drops of dew make
as they run sideways, carving paths through the dust
as we speed through the gray dawn
even where I sit on the worn pleather bench
the wet air is heavy in my throat

padding through the ditch
beside the unlined country road that leads from my home
I watch a lynx fade into fog thick as a cotton quilt
her yellow eyes pierce
my soul



Wildcats

three.

panthers prowl the cliffs around the lake
the night is theirs

from my bed I hear a wail
a cry like a woman's scream echoes through the night
the high notes crack lightening

just beyond the treeline
my sisters call for me

four.

my headlights search
find glowing eyes in the dark
something in me awakens, screams sharp
in that dark night

soon I will cut ties
pull up roots
run fast
leave behind the things
that drag me
burdens that drown me
heavy as cinder blocks tied to my kicking feet



Wildcats

five.

one day I will rise-
a ghost from the mist-
and prowl Kentucky's lands
my sisters by my side

wild women never die-
we return wild, free
soft fur punctuated with piercing claws and sharp teeth
fierce flowing power in our veins
we seal our bond with a communion of tinny blood
drank warm from fast beating bird hearts

in the foggy dawn
we emerge
eternal



Despoina

tw: mentions of assault, blood

When I was born,
Mother cleansed her womb
in the waters of River Ladon.
How do you love a daughter
whose birth is a sin you wash off?

Mother, my lover shivers at my touch.
My kisses scar rime onto his bones
and I don't know what to do—
I've only ever known love as the daughter
of a stallion and his victim.

I inherited Father's trident for fingers—
did they remind you of his teeth in your skin,
the cherry wine and the broken lips?
When you held me for the first time,
is that why you dropped me like autumn?



Icarus

I saw him. I saw him go in. I saw him in the sky first, falling, and then I saw the splash when he struck the water. It was pretty obvious, I don't know why nobody else saw it. Or maybe they did and just didn't do anything about it. That's what Auden did. He just stood there, biting his tongue, and wrote a poem. Me, I dove in. I tried to save the poor kid. I didn't know who he was, but a boy with wings, I figured he had to be someone special. Not that I wouldn't have tried to save him if he wasn't, I'm just saying, it was on my mind. Wings. I'd never seen that before. But wings or no, it took me forever to find him, and when I finally did, he was already dead. I did CPR anyway, but it was no good, so I gave up and looked at the others, who were still going about their business like nothing had happened. Then I turned to the poet.

"Why didn't you do anything?" I said to him. "Why didn't you help? And don't say you don't know how to swim, because I know you can. I've seen you. You're like a dolphin. So why did you just stand there and



Icarus

not do anything?"

But he just shrugged and, kicking one of the wings,
said, "I had to write my poem."

Fucking Auden.



devilry. storytelling corpus. rivers of chain rising from seven dead siblings.

we plant trees in the backyard to replace oxygen we've taken. *satan* begats a nature preserve.

in Hebrew, *to oppose*. revolutionary, with a source of flames & such.

but. but in traditional mythology, god quarrels, creates adversaries of, & vanquishes symbols.

Bar Yochnei, *ziz*, larger than cities, destined to save the world, dead.

i call my half-sister saying that, soon, a Chabad house will open between three hotels in town.

she says that feels correct.

Behemoth, *behemah*, proficient in godly practices, destined to save the world, dead.

my mother, the one neither of us feel akin to but are, too Irish to be Irish, tells me to never say:

dew.

warm & gentle neighborhoods of droplets who collapse into puddles.

no one knows where they go when the sun makes its rounds.

Leviathan, *taninim*, given a home where humans can't go, destined to save the world, dead.

we stop consuming flesh or flesh adjacencies. anything with a body, corporeal, non-conforming.

the word *etcetera* sounds like viscera. we eat what seems to belong to us.

after sanctuary or preservation, the next born child is abandonment.

we were never eating from the start.



Mother of Pine Trees

Long ago, during a brutal winter, a demon climbed from the sulfuric depths determined to corrupt humankind. During a harsh frigid night, the demon spotted a young woman and followed her home, deep into the overgrown forest.

Soon, the demon realized he was lost and approached her seeking shelter from the brewing storm and winter clouds. Unaware that the man she offered lodging and food was a demon, the woman invited him into her home.

The demon thought what he felt for the woman was love, but demons don't know what love is, they can't comprehend such an emotion. No, what he thought to be love was a cursed obsession.

The beast took what it wanted from the woman and left her broken.

Her grandmother was a kind powerful witch, but when she discovered what happened to her granddaughter, she harnessed the power of the winter spirits to beat the demon down to the pits it



Mother of Pine Trees

crawled from.

Winter spirits capture the lingering souls of the flora and fauna so in the spring life can start anew. Because the grandmother witch took that power, balance was disrupted. The winter spirits did not forgive her for what she stole and lashed out, taking the grandmother witch's life to restore what was disturbed.

The family blamed their daughter for enticing the demon and for the resulting death of her grandmother. They banished her from their home, and she was forced to give birth to her twin sons in the woods.

Both of her boys had hooves for feet. As the boys grew the young mother noticed one was innocent, sweet, kind. The other was bitter, sinister, devoid of empathy. Alone and without help, the young mother wasn't sure what to do. She was afraid of her son.

When she tried to return home, they turned her away in shame.



Mother of Pine Trees

During the longest night of the winter the mother went outside and began begging. She prayed to the winter spirits for recourse. The winter spirits took pity on her. Although they struck the life of her grandmother, they didn't enjoy in this woman's suffering.

During the darkest part of night, when the stars and the moon were snuffed out, the winter spirits came and spoke to the mom. They told her there was a tree where she could imprison her son, but on a night like this, the tree would have to breathe.

The winter spirits explained the tree could hold her son within its trunk when it inhaled. But on winter solstice the tree would need to exhale, releasing the son for one night.

Agreeing to the terms, the mother left the woods with her other son and didn't return. The winter spirits placed the son and the tree near her family's cabin. The tree grew wide, the bark turned dark, and leaves became sharp needles to keep others away.



Mother of Pine Trees

The family guarded the tree, keeping the beast within the woods on the lone forsaken night their grandson was released.

When the boy stepped out for the first time, he cried and with tearful eyes pleaded for a chance to prove his worth. But the family condemned him, pointing to his hooves as evidence of his demonic being. They would return him to the tree as soon as the sun peeked above the trees.

When the boy stepped out for a second time, he was foul, vicious, and fought the family ferociously. The family felt that they made the right choice, pushing him back into the tree once more. On the third time he climbed out of the tree the boy had grown beyond their strength. He easily pushed them aside with one swipe of his gnarled hand. He ate what he killed, and the family was no more.

Appalled by what they witnessed, the winter spirits called to the mother to help with her son. The mother refused, afraid of what she created. She didn't want



Mother of Pine Trees

to risk the life of her other son.

Furious the winter spirits raged around her, refusing to let spring blossom or summer shine. Unable to bear anymore freezing cold, the mother relented and went to her son within the tree. She asked the tree to let her son out into the world and she would take his place. The tree denied the mother, not wanting to cause an imbalance. *You are the root* the tree explained. *You were not nurtured nor loved as you should have been and the cycle continued on. You should not be ashamed for what was done, you should not sacrifice yourself to replace what was lost. If you trap what you fear, then you fear what you release. How do you choose to move forward with your spirit, you, who have become one with the winter and tree?*

The mother and her son returned to the tree daily, building her own cabin around the trunk. They danced to the tree, sang with the tree, and provided nutrients to the roots. When it came time for the son



Mother of Pine Trees

to step out of the tree for a fourth time, he rejoiced in seeing his mother and brother. He joined them and they became whole.

When the mother passed, the siblings buried her under the tree, where she was reborn as a pinecone. Forever spreading her seeds, providing shelter for those who are deserving and trapping those who are not.



Mermaid



Cassia

Mother, I just know you'll love him once you get to know him.

Sulfur. My daughter smells of sulfur. Great fires have burned around her. I know this and I know to keep my mouth shut. I clutch my clutch. I avoid biting down on my lip, because I fear getting lipstick on my teeth. Howser should have come with me, but New York City is no place for a dog that wasn't born here. That wasn't born smelling the skyscrapers and inhaling constantly the fragrance of streetside hot dogs.

Mother, don't be too hard on him. He's misunderstood the way all great men are. The way father probably was when you met him.

The day I met her father, he had stopped by the farm to pick up several pies my sister had made for him that morning. They were to be married until he took one look at me and decided I would make for a more



Cassia

suitable bride. On our wedding night, I walked outside and prayed to the moon that this man who I was meant to spend my life with would die in his sleep. A cloud passed over my face, and when I went back inside the house, he'd stopped breathing. I remember dancing back out into the yard to sing my gratitude at having been made a widow. I didn't know you were already forming inside me. I didn't know you had chosen to remain.

Mother, I was standing in front of the big sign with all the train times and destinations for three hours. I knew when you were coming, but I just had to get here early, because I was so excited. Isn't Grand Central the most beautiful place? Sometimes I come here and I just stand and watch people come and go, come and go. Do you find that strange?

The first letter came when she was sixteen. It was in a silver envelope and the penmanship on the front



Cassia

was impeccable. Her name had never looked more lovely.

Cassia.

I tore it up, but it didn't matter. The next day I found three more just like it in her room. I nearly left them undisturbed. I told myself that a young lady deserved some privacy. Then I remembered that my job was to keep the silver out of her heart until she could no longer resist it. The first letter spoke of clouds and thunder. The second of exile and despair. The third talked of how many rivers a love must cross. How close one must be able to stand near a flame. The tailored orange. The relaxed red.

Mother, you have to walk quicker than that. He's expecting us at six for dinner. Six on the dot. He doesn't like tardiness. Not that he shows his temper. Not with me. Still, we should try to arrive a little bit



Cassia

early if we can. I know you're probably tired and don't feel like yourself after the train ride in, but I told you to take an earlier one, didn't I? Now you're going to have to go to dinner in your traveling clothes. There just isn't any way around it.

The night she snuck out her window, I heard a truck backfire at the end of the driveway. My legs had swollen up right after dinner. I knew I couldn't chase after her. Outside I went, no longer a scared newlywed, and asked the moon to bring my daughter back. A cloud cast itself across my face, but this time, it didn't pass. It didn't pass until the sun came up the next morning. I woke up on top of the grass. All of it brown. All of it having died overnight. The milk spoiled in the fridge. The lambs attacking each other as though they were possessed by wolves. The screen door leading into the house ripped to shreds. I had my warning. I knew the moon's answer and it was no answer at all.



Cassia

Remember when you said you would never come visit me here? Remember how sure you were? I just knew if I held out long enough, you'd given in. I knew you couldn't be as stubborn as he said you were. I knew nobody was that stubborn.

The phone would ring at three. I wouldn't pick up. She'd leave messages on the machine. Apologetic, then mournful, then hysterical. She needed her mother. A man didn't change what a young woman needs, but she was seventeen now, and that meant she could make her own choices. She'd made a choice. It was all love and silver. Her voice sounded like a bad bargain. The machine filled up. I didn't bother replacing the tape. It wasn't until I got her letter that I booked my train ticket. I told my sister that if I didn't come back, she should sell the farm and keep the profit. She told me I was a tramp and my daughter was just like me stealing men that didn't belong to us. I knew that was the liquor twisting her



Cassia

tongue, but I hung up on her all the same. I had packing to do.

Isn't this the most beautiful restaurant you ever saw in your life? Fancy tablecloths and everything. We eat here two--sometimes three times a week! I've had the most exotic foods, Mother. Escargot and things like that. You would practically think I was French the way I eat now, and it shows. My skin is so light now. Not like it used to be when I was out in the sun all day working, working, working. Mother, do you need to sit and catch your breath?

A woman sat next to me on the train and asked if she could apply her make-up or would that bother me? I told her it was a free train in a free country last I checked. She smiled, and I could tell that she had a thing for people who don't care to notice her. She asked me where I was going, and I told her that I was headed to New York City to see my daughter and her



Cassia

new husband. I told her when I got there, I was going to ask them to take me on a subway ride. My new son-in-law would insist on paying for a taxi, but I'd say that I wanted to ride the world famous New York subway, and my daughter would do the whining that she does, and he'd give in. As soon as we were underground, I'd smile at him and make conversation, but as soon as that train got close, I'd shove him right onto the tracks. Right in front of her and me and however many other people were watching. I'd return him to silver with no questions left in my heart about it. The moon would forgive me or it wouldn't. I had no time for consideration.

Mother, smile. You're not smiling. He likes it when women smile.

The woman putting on her make-up told me that her husband messes around with everyone under the sun. Told me he'd get a bull pregnant if it was a cow. Kids



Cassia

all over the country, because he was some kind of salesman. *Jupiter, Ltd.* Had I heard of them? No, I hadn't. She finished her make-up, opened up her purse, pulled out a small bottle, and placed it in my lap. Told me that subways are messy and homicides make people late for work. These days everybody's concerned with punctuality. She told me poison is the lady's way. *Your son-in-law sounds like a man that likes soup. Hot soup. When he uses the little boy's room, you tell your daughter to go ask the maître d' to turn down the heat, because you're too hot, and she'll oblige. Once they're both gone, everything in that bottle goes into the soup. Kit and caboodle. He'll have a fine night, but his morning is going to be hell. That's how it was for my husband. I even put a little in his brother's soup just for good measure. Never liked him anyway. Always smelled like fish.* I didn't thank her, but I put the bottle in my clutch.



Cassia

Mother, there he is at the table. Isn't he handsome?

Handsome and a lick-lipper with all the trappings of good breeding. Never adopt a dead rich man's dog, because it'll only eat steak. These are the things you know if you grew up wanting to know things. If you didn't grow up only caring about somebody loving you and you loving them back. He motioned for us to come forward. I let my daughter lead the way. The soup was already in front of him, but his spoon was clean.

Mother, he said, I didn't want to start until you arrived.

I told him I was here now. I told him to eat, but slowly. Savor the meal. Before that though, I suggested he use the men's room. Get it out of the way. I told him that once we started talking, I wasn't going to let him out of my sight.



Gemella: Awakening

I visited in her dreams last night
lighting a flame of wonder
raising questions so she will ponder
who and what I am

in her waking hours I play
amongst the clouds leaving
smoky trails with messages of love
trying to spark her interest

in the setting sun she can see
the flicker of my wings
and feel my warming breath
melding with the twilight
at that moment I send a message
with all the power I have until
the connection links

she hears me now
she knows I'm here to guide her
to find inner strength
to leave fear behind
to break earthly bonds



Gemella: Awakening

on our own we're only half
of what soulmates should be
we are still worlds apart but
one day soon she'll learn
to trust, to risk and fly away with me

*Note: Gemella is a dragon searching for her rider.
Together they will be Anima Gemella (soulmate)*



Soliloquy of the Roman Demagogue

Protect our border to the south
from loathsome Astomi, who crawl
their way from Ganges' muddy mouth—
these men who have no mouths at all.

Somebody oughta build a wall!
They do not speak, they do not eat,
but feed on smells—and could you bear
this dumb throng on a Roman street
with grimy noses in the air?

When you're in Rome, speak Roman there!
Fear Scythians, a sandy clan
of desert-dwellers trekking west
who gnaw upon the skulls of man
and wear a scalp upon each breast.

Scythia doesn't send their best.
They'll suck your body bloodless dry;
they'll suck the pith from every bone,
then slip (in form like you and I)
among the forum crowd, unknown.

It won't be safe to walk alone.



Soliloquy of the Roman Demagogue

Shun Cynocephali, a den
of dog-head people from the east.
I do not call them lesser men,
for they are even less than beast.

I note them last, for they are least.

O! If our wolfish stock unite
with dirty bitch-breeds, who contrive
to drool with mongrel appetite
o'er Roman daughters, Roman wives,

how will the Roman race survive?

In restless dreams of night and day
I see the swill of nations pour
through swift and slime-slick waterway
to crash against our battened door.

Or are they marching as to war?

Though mute and muttish hordes combine
and savage tribesmen cry their hate—
by Terminus, we'll hold the line
and turn the stranger at the gate

to keep the Roman Empire great!



Love is a Burning Happiness

Snegurochka sputtered to life that October morning and felt the air rush in through her mouth, forcing open cavities in her chest for her lungs, every muscle stretching and groaning into animation. The first thing she was aware of was the sensation on her skin of something terrible. Something that stung and prickled and made her icy skin sweat.

She turned her face up towards where the sensation came from and forced open her eyelids. Her lids crackled as they split apart and sun poured into her eyes. The bright light seemed to extend all the way to the back of her head and she turned away as water started to fall from her eyes, freezing on her cheeks.

She heard a gasp and turned to look where the noise came from. There were two beings standing near her, people, although she didn't know how she knew the word. They were staring at her, mouths agape.

"You're real!" the woman exclaimed. She was red and flushed from the cold, with wild wisps of gray hair plastered to her skin. She reached for



Love is a Burning Happiness

Snegurochka and touched her cheek with a light finger.

The faint heat from her skin burned and Snegurochka recoiled.

Shocked, the woman's hands flew to her mouth. "Don't you recognize us? Don't you know us?"

Snegurochka shook her head, still unsure how to form words with her not-yet opened mouth.

"We're your parents," the man said then, stepping forward. He was sturdy, with a whole nest of crow's feet clustered in the corners of his eyes. There was something familiar about the pair of them, but Snegurochka couldn't find the words to say why.

"We prayed for you. For years. But we thought all hope was lost," he continued. "Then the gods heard our prayers. Ded Moroz heard us and told us to build a snow maiden, then everything would be taken care of."

"And here you are." There were tears in the woman's eyes now. Snegurochka reached out to touch the woman's cheek in return, and felt the burning hot liquid of the tear sear into her flesh. She



Love is a Burning Happiness

stared at her hand as a red welt began to rise.

The woman pretended that the icy sting of her finger didn't bother her. "Well come inside, come inside. Let's get out of this cold."

She let the couple usher her into their cabin, although they refrained from touching her bare skin, and only touched the middle of her back where her coat and hair protected her from their radial warmth. But as the door shut behind her and she was cut off from the outside world, she felt like she was being trapped inside an oven.

Stinging needles ran up and down her body as gooseflesh rose on her arms. She convulsed, then forced her mouth open with her thin fingers. "Hot," she cried, startled by the sound of her own voice.

Immediately, the couple rushed to accommodate their new-found child. The woman threw open the windows, while the man doused the fire with a heavy blanket. They turned to her expectantly and she tried to force the corners of her mouth to turn up in a smile, but her skin cracked and ached.

It was still too warm.



Love is a Burning Happiness

"I'll bring you some ice water. You must be thirsty," the woman said. She scuttled out of the room and came back in with a cup packed full of barely melted snow.

Greedily, Snegurochka gulped it down in an instant. It felt cool and soothing on her parched lips and tongue, but it seemed to open new pathways that were shriveled and empty as it went down, forcing life into her stilted organs. She tried not to grimace. "Thank you."

The couple now sat down on the stone top of the fireplace, letting the latent heat warm them ever so slightly. Then they turned to each other. Concern was writ large on both of their faces. What were they to do with their strange daughter?

"May I have some more?" Snegurochka asked, holding out her cup.

"Of course dear," the man said, rising and taking the cup from her, then going back out to fill it.

They both watched as once again, Snegurochka choked down ice and snow. But this time, it did little to soothe the fire that was once again building



Love is a Burning Happiness

inside of her. She looked longingly outside, but as she turned back, she noticed that the couple had begun to shiver.

As the day went on, and the sun began to set, the couple grew colder. They covered themselves in furs and piled on all the wool blankets they had. But still their mouths turned blue and their eyelashes frosted over with ice. All the while, Snegurochka ate cupful after cupful of snow until her stomach ached, anything to chase away the heat of living.

Finally, night came in full. The couple passed into uneasy sleep, propped against each other on top of the great stone fireplace.

Snegurochka rose, closed the windows, kissed them both on the forehead with her icy lips, then relit the fire. There was a small pang in her heart as she watched the shivering stop, and the couple relax into each other.

She gave them one final, longing, glance before stepping out of the cabin. The snow flurried around her in eddies that soothed her blistered skin even as they stung. Snegurochka looked up at the moon, high



Love is a Burning Happiness

overhead, and nodded to herself. Then, she walked out into the clearing, buried herself in the snow, and waited for the sun to rise.



Selkie

Selkie-woman longs to be free.

night & night again, the tide unravels
swaddling the shore
in ripples of silk.

bare feet reach from the floorboards
to dance with ocean drums
like a girl:

moon-drunk &
glistening. love, he calls it,
shovels sand over her grief.

the sea, it stirs in her still.
she knows this

by the salt weeping from her pores
by the stains she bleaches and
linens washed, day &
day again.

Dandelion and Wild Rose

Minnie was six months old when wasting blew a dry wind across her plump baby body. She was a creek bed in a drought, edges growing dry, white, cracking, blowing away, sluggish rivulets creeping between stones. Her parents watched, helpless. The doctors had no answers.

She hardly cried. Quiet as that dry river.

Her fat cheeks dropped hollowly into her face.

All the touches and snuggles and firm hugs grew to feathers brushed on hot skin. Afraid of breakage. Afraid of connection. Afraid of what was coming.

Her mother requested fewer hours from work at the hospital. She tried to engage the wasting baby. She tried to nurse her. Tried to feed her. Watched the child take what was offered but waste and waste and waste.

"I'm your momma," she whispered. "Stay with me."

Her momma, who her daddy called Reena, still had to go to work. Then her daddy would be there, and he did not whisper anything. Mostly he just cried.



Dandelion and Wild Rose

Thin, listless, hardly grown, Minnie turned one. Her momma stumbled in the door with an old woman. The old woman had an arm around her momma, as if for support. "Come," her momma said. The old woman swept in with old smells like rot and pine sap that washed away the dinner smells of tomato sauce and pasta and the love smell of Momma. "Sit with us tonight and have some dinner. It's too cold out there."

Was the night so cold? Could Minnie, through her tired flesh and paper skin feel that chill pressed hard against the windows making bright pinpricks of the stars? Could she feel the great expanse of the forest beyond, holding the cold, bitter eyes of the night?

"A hot meal," her momma told the woman. "It fixes a lot. How do you feel now? A little stronger? Yes, I'm a nurse, emergency department. I think you'll be fine." The old woman said things, but Minnie could not understand them, just the spaces where her momma's words fell. Her momma's words came with all the feelings that Minnie felt skittering around when her momma was in the room.



Dandelion and Wild Rose

"What is *that*? *That* is my baby. She's sick. No, really, she's very sick, please don't."

But the old woman was above her so fast and her momma trailed too slow and the old woman grabbed her momma's hand and touched Minnie. The three of them slid through each other and her momma screamed. "See," the old woman said. "Changeling."

Minnie saw through her momma's eyes. Saw her own self. Saw *twisted*, saw *fog*. She was a thing of fog and birch bark, bitter berries and worms and earth dissolving and melting away beneath her, then Daddy was there and grabbing them both and asking, demanding "*What what what's going on here?*" and now Daddy saw too and she was just dissolving away under their seeing and suddenly Momma was saying *you're hurting her you're hurting it, shhhshhhshhh* don't cry don't cry it's OK. And Momma saw her.

The old woman stayed with them through dinner. There were whispered conversations. She would not sleep in the house. When she left the sight she'd given remained, like her sour smell of old milk



Dandelion and Wild Rose

lingering, and her words kept bouncing back and forth, back and forth, *there is only one thing you can do with such a thing. Fire. You have no chance of getting your baby back unless the changeling is burned. Get rid of it, or you will surely never see your child again. If you burn it, there's at least a chance.*

Minnie slept a restless sleep. It was hazed by forest dreams, hateful creeping beetles licking up dung from sick animals and watching her, baleful unwelcome fragmented skittering vision telling her not welcome, not welcome, not welcome anywhere.

There were many tears when she woke to tender fingers brushing moss curls from her forehead. "I won't. She doesn't deserve it." Momma's voice, sounding wet as drowning in a well.

"She's an it. A thing."

"Does it matter?"

"We'll never get our Minnie back if we don't--"

"Burn her? Does she deserve that?"

"It. Burn it. They took our baby and left a monster."



Dandelion and Wild Rose

"And gave us *her*. I've cared for her now as long as I had cared for our Minnie. She didn't do this to our baby. She's just a victim, like us, like Minnie."

A long silence, long as the breath that is lost in kisses, or tears, or dying. Minnie felt inside her, the pulsing slug that was her heart, weak and halting.

"It's . . . she's a monster."

"How? Because she's 'ugly'? Because she's different? She's alive, look at her. A baby."

"I don't know if I can."

Minnie reached for him, wrapped a hand of centipede fingers and cicada husks around one rough finger and held. She gurgled dryly, a stream of slime wriggling from her lips. Her momma bent over and brushed her warm cheek of flesh against the cool fog of Minnie's forehead.

"She deserves to be loved, doesn't she?" Momma said. A warm pulse of heat flushed through Daddy's finger and charged into her. Momma's cheek rested on hers and warmth pulsed into her. She kicked and gurgled happily. A spring bubbled over into her creek bed. Inside the cage of briars that held that



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throbbing slug of a heart, a tiny bud appeared. Another and another. They opened, brushed soft petals against her. Wood anemone, dandelion, wild rose. They opened and opened and they filled her.





BIOGRAPHIES

COLLEEN S. HARRIS

A three-time Pushcart Prize nominee, Colleen S. Harris is the author of *God in My Throat: The Lilith Poems* (Bellowing Ark, 2009), *These Terrible Sacraments* (Bellowing Ark, 2010), and *The Kentucky Vein* (Punkin House, 2011), and co-editor of *Women Versed in Myth: Essays on Modern Women Poets* (McFarland, 2016).

CM ELLIS

cm ellis (Michael C.) is the fiction editor for *Ghost City Review* and lives in Texas. Their affair with art has been wildly inappropriate and deeply embarrassing for all involved. You can witness this yourself in their chapbook, *Yellow Rose Effigy*, released by Bottlecap Press (2024). They also really like pistachios. If you're lookin you can find them here, <https://linktr.ee/poemsandwhiskeypod>

SARAH R. NEW

Sarah R. New has been writing since she was 6. She specialises primarily in horror or fiction with horrific elements, but also writes speculative fiction and non-fiction. Her self published travel memoir, *The Great European Escape*, was released in 2023, and her Gothic horror novella, *Amissis Liberis*, was published in 2024. Sarah lives in the U.K., but frequently travels internationally. She can be found on Bluesky, Instagram and Twitter under the username aldbera.

MARK J. MITCHELL

Mark J. Mitchell has been a working poet for 50 years. He's the author of five full-length collections, and six chapbooks. His latest collection is *Something To Be* from Pski's Porch Publishing. He's fond of baseball, Louis Aragon, Dante, and his wife, activist Joan Juster. He lives in San Francisco where he points out pretty thingsy things.

ALICE TARBUCK

Alice Tarbuck is an award-winning poet and writer. Her debut non-fiction book *A Spell in the Wild: a year (and six centuries) of Magic* is published by Hodder & Stoughton. With Claire Askew, she is the co-editor of *The Modern Craft*, published by Watkins. She is a previous winner of the Scottish Book Trust New Writer's Award for poetry, and recipient of their award for programming. She has taught Creative Writing at the Universities of Dundee and York, and is a Lead Reader for Open Book.

NORA RAY

Nora Ray is a traveling author, writing about the sad and the bizarre. Her fiction appeared in *Ergot*, *Surely*, *Guilty*, and is forthcoming in *MoonPark Review*. You can find her on X: @noraraywrites



CELESTE COLARIČ-GONZALES

Celeste Colarič-Gonzales (she/her) writes/arts/mothers in Oakland, CA on unceded Chochenyo Ohlone land. A dual M(F)A candidate at SFSU, she's the recipient of several awards, including the Marcus Fellowship. When not wording, she paints, does old-school photography, or otherwise crafts. Find her words+ in/forthcoming from *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *Blood Orange Review*, *NELLE*, *The Ana*, *Woodcrest Magazine*, and *Transfer*, where she's served as Poetry Editor and EIC.

ANNA KIRBY

Anna Kirby is a community college English instructor living in North Carolina. Her collages have been selected for juried exhibitions across the country and published in numerous magazines and literary journals. She makes her collages using second-hand books, scissors, glue dots, and oil paints. Anna Kirby's collages are sensory poems that express the complex emotions surrounding PTSD, abuse, child loss, infertility, and female identity.

JOSHUA C. PIPKINS

Joshua C. Pipkins is a Pushcart nominated poet based in Memphis, Tennessee.

JK SAAVEDRA

JK Saavedra is a Philippines-based novelist, poet, game designer, and enjoyer of martial arts. He wishes to write pieces that are as quick and damaging as the cuts of a sword.

JER HAYES

Jer Hayes is from Dublin, Ireland. He is a new (old) writer.

JAWN VAN JACOBS

Jawn Van Jacobs is a spitfire South Jersey poet who holds back nothing in the name of poetry. His work has appeared in *Cool Beans Lit*, *Moonday Magazine*, and *Paper Dragon*. Jawn's poetry explores the raw and untamed narratives of outlaws and mystics, shedding light on the lives of those living on the fringes of society. His writing is steeped in magic and myth, blending the natural world with a sense of otherworldly wonder. Follow him on IG @jawnvanjacobs.



DAVID HENSON

David Henson and his wife have lived in Belgium and Hong Kong over the years and now reside in Illinois. His work has been nominated for four Pushcart Prizes, two Best Small Fictions and Best of the Net and has appeared in numerous print and online journals including *The Metaworker*, *Ghost Parachute*, *Fictive Dream*, *Pithead Chapel*, *Moonpark Review*, *Literally Stories* and *Fiction* on the web. His website is <http://writings217.wordpress.com>. His Twitter is @annalou8.

MELISSA JOPLIN HIGLEY

Melissa Joplin Higley is the author of *First Father* (Bottlecap Press) and *We Shake & Seek* (Origami Poems Project). In 2021, her poem "Anticipatory Grief" won the Grand Prize in the 90th Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition. Her poems appear or are forthcoming in *B_O_D_Y*, *Crab Orchard Review*, *Feral*, *The Penn Review*, *Rise Up Review*, *Rogue Agent*, *Whale Road Review*, and elsewhere. Melissa holds an MFA from Sarah Lawrence College, co-facilitates the Poetry Craft Collective, co-edits book reviews for MER, and serves as the 2024-2026 Town of Mamaroneck Author Laureate. Visit her online: melissajoplinhigley.com.

OWEN TOWNEND

Owen Townend is a writer of short speculative fiction and poetry inspired by thought experiment and wordplay. His work is published in anthologies from Arachne Press, Comma Press, Oxford Spires Publishing, Written Off Publishing, Astrea Publishing, Wicked Shadow Press and others. He lives in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire.

KAT MEADS

Kat Meads's most recent titles are *These Particular Women* and the forthcoming novelette, *While Visiting Babette*.

KATHY BRUCE

Kathy Bruce is a visual artist based in Argyll & Bute Scotland. Bruce's work explores mythological female forms within the context of poetry, literature and the natural environment. Ms. Bruce is the recipient of numerous grants and awards including a Pollock-Krasner Foundation Fellowship, 2 Fulbright-Hayes scholar grants to Peru and a Ford Foundation Grant. She has exhibited her work in the US, UK and internationally including Senegal, Taiwan, Denmark, Peru, France, and Canada. She holds an MFA from Yale University and certificate from The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts.

DANA KNOTT

Dana Knott's writing has recently appeared in *The Selkie*, *Moss Puppy*, *Minerva Rising*, and *Dust Poetry Magazine*. Currently, she works as an academic library director in Ohio, and is the editor of *tiny wren lit*. You can follow her on Twitter at @dana_a_knott



GILLIAN CRAIG

Gillian Craig is a Scottish poet and author, who has spent twenty years in the Middle East, South East Asia and East Asia. Her poems have appeared in a wide range of publications, including *New Writing Scotland*, *Orbis, Abridged* and *Black Bough*. She is also a children's picture book author, writing as Gillian Spiller.

BRITTANY REDD

Brittany Redd (she/they) is a teacher and writer in Thailand. Her work appears or is forthcoming in *Funicular Magazine*, *Corvid Queen*, *Middle West Press*, and elsewhere.

MARK HENDRICKSON

Mark Hendrickson (he/him/his) is a gay poet and writer in the Des Moines area. His work has appeared in *Variant Lit*, *Five Minutes*, *Leaf*, *Cosmic Daffodil*, and others. Mark worked for many years as a Mental Health Technician in a locked psychiatric unit. He has advanced degrees in marriage & family therapy, health information management, and music. Connect with him @MarkHPoetry or on his website: www.markhendricksonpoetry.com

HENNA OAK

Henna Oak (she, her) is a college student in St. Paul, Minnesota. She is majoring in creative writing and geology and works part-time as a barista. In her free time she enjoys saving spiders, learning Icelandic, and watching horror movies with her mother.

JEAN SHEPPARD

Jean Sheppard is a writer, teacher, and editor living in Toronto, Canada.

VINCENZO COHEN

Vincenzo Cohen is an Italian multidisciplinary artist. He graduated in Painting from Fine Arts Academy and subsequently achieved the degree in Archaeology from "La Sapienza" University in Rome. The artist's production ranges from visual arts to writing and consists in the exploration of cultural, social and environmental content. His interest in history pushes him to investigate the human origins through the study of archetypes and myths across the Mediterranean. Over the years his art has opened up to new experimental languages with different media and styles.



NICHOLAS DE MARINO

Nicholas De Marino is a neurodivergent writer of fiction, non-fiction, not fiction, unfiction, and semi-fiction. He founded *5enses*, published the first six years, and is a columnist at foofaraw. He has several writing credits, degrees, and accolades that have nothing to do with cats. Read more at nicholasdemarino.com.

ROBERT CANDON

Robert Candon is semi-retired from real estate and drives a limo part time. He belongs to an online writing club in Providence, RI. He's written several novels and a couple dozen short pieces.

SARAH JOSEPHINE PENNINGTON

Sarah Josephine Pennington (she/her) is a queer writer and artist from Louisville, KY by way of Appalachia. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in journals including *Still: The Journal*, *The Anthology of Appalachian Writers*, *storySouth*, *riddlebird*, *Untelling*, and *Yellow Arrow Journal*, and her work has been supported by the Kentucky Foundation for Women and the Filson Historical Society. Her chapbook *where the bluegrass grows: June 1916* is forthcoming from *Porkbelly Press*.

BABITHA MARINA JUSTIN

Babitha Marina Justin is an academic, poet and artist. Her poems, short stories and articles have appeared in *Taylor and Francis* journals, *Marshal Cavendish, The Yearbook* (2020, 21, 22), *Singing in the Dark* (Penguin), *Eclectica, Esthetic Apostle, Jaggery, Fulcrum, The Scriblerus, Trampset, Constellations, Indian Literature*, etc. Her books are *Of Fireflies, Guns and the Hills* (Poetry, 2015), *I Cook My Own Feast* (Poetry, 2019), *salt, pepper and silverlinings: celebrating our grandmothers* (an anthology on grandmothers, 2019), *From Canons to Trauma* (Essays, 2017), *Forty Five Shades of Brown* (Poetrywala, 2023).

LIZ DEBEER

Liz deBeer is a teacher and writer with Project Write Now, a writing cooperative based in New Jersey. Her latest flash has appeared in *Switch, Lucky Jefferson, Bending Genres, Every Day Fiction, Sad Girls Diaries, Libre, and 10x10 Flash Fiction*. She has written essays in various journals including *Brevity Blog* and *New Jersey English Journal*. She holds degrees from University of Pennsylvania and Rutgers University. Liz's website is www.ldebeerwriter.com.

SUCHITA SENTHIL KUMAR

Suchita Senthil Kumar is a poet from Bengaluru, India. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Live Wire India, Aster Lit, Honey Literary* and *Corvid Queen* among others. She makes life decisions asking herself one question: Will Sirius Black be proud? She's on the 'gram as @suchita.senthilkumar and tweets as @suchita_senthil.



WOLFGANG WRIGHT

Wolfgang Wright is the author of the comic novel *Me and Gepe*. His short work has appeared in over forty literary magazines, including *The Bombay Literary Review*, *Dark Yonder*, and *Paris Lit Up*. He doesn't tolerate gluten so well, quite enjoys watching British panel shows, and devotes a little time each day to contemplating the Tao. He lives in North Dakota.

JAY D. FALCETTI

Jay D. Falcetti (she/her) is a biracial indigenous writer who grew up on a small reservation in northern Arizona and currently resides in Washington with her family. You can find her and where her short stories are published on Instagram @jdfalcetti. Jay D. Falcetti is a pen name.

KEVIN B

Kevin B is a writer and poet from New England. They have been published in *Esoterica*, *Molecule*, *Havik*, and *New Plains Review*. They are the George Lila Award Winner for Short Fiction.

LIAM STRONG

Liam Strong (they/them) is a queer neurodivergent straight edge punk writer who has earned their BA in writing from University of Wisconsin-Superior. They are the author of the chapbook *Everyone's Left the Hometown Show* (Bottlecap Press, 2023). You can find their poetry and essays in *Vagabond City* and *new words {press}*, among several others. They are most likely gardening and listening to Bitter Truth somewhere in Northern Michigan. Find them on Instagram/Twitter: @beanbie666. <https://linktr.ee/iamstrong666>

LIS ANNA-LANGSTON

Hailed as “an author with a genuine flair for originality” by Midwest Book Review and “a loveable, engaging, original voice...” by Publishers Weekly, Lis Anna-Langston is the author of five novels. Raised along the winding current of the Mississippi River she studied Literature and Creative Writing and graduated Magna Cum Laude in 2023. Winner of the NYC Big Book Award, Independent Press Awards and dozens of other book awards, she is a three-time Pushcart award nominee, with work published extensively in literary journals.

KARIN EATON

Karin Eaton is a writer, traveller and student of Ancient Egypt. She is enjoying retirement in the rural tranquility of Lake Scugog, Ontario. Her poetry and travel stories have appeared in *Common Tread*, an online motorcycle magazine, the *Persimmon Tree fall 2023 Short Takes*, six *Quillkeepers Press Anthologies* and *Dragon Dreams Anthology – Storm* Dragon Publishing. She has won poetry awards with Scugog Council for the Arts, Royal Canadian Legion Seniors Literary Contest and the 2023 Spring Motorcycle Show Biker Poetry - Ladies Award.



JOSHUA BOERS

Joshua Boers has published short stories and poetry in *Procrastinating Writers United*, *The MockingOwl Roost*, and *Infinity Wanderers*. He won the Judge's Choice award in the 2024 Write Michigan Short Story Contest. By day, he is an editorial assistant at an indie book publisher. By night, he can generally be found reading P. G. Wodehouse novels, playing with his cat Mishka, or doubling the garlic in a fried rice recipe.

NIKA TESHIN

Nika Teshin (they, she) is an author and librarian in the Sacramento Valley, where they live with their partner and two cats, Clunk and Dunker. When they aren't writing they can be found hiking, sewing, weaving, or pickling. Their work has previously been published in *Aberration Labyrinth* and *Creepy Podcast*. Their short story, *Dear Tempy*, will be read by Stories on Stage Davis in October, was featured as an honorable mention in *ALLEGORY* volume 45/72, and was published in Issue 97 of *Andromeda Spaceways Magazine*.

ELLIE CAMERON

Ellie Cameron (she/her) is a poet and fiction writer with a BA in Creative Writing from Susquehanna University. She enjoys consuming grotesque amounts of horror media, chasing stray cats, and communing with the local forest spirits. You can find her other work in *The Sanctuary Magazine*, *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*, and *Wild Onions*, among others.

T.J. BERG

T. J. Berg is a molecular and cellular biologist. She is a graduate of the *Odyssey Writing Workshop*. Her short fiction has appeared in many places, including *Talebones* (for which it received an honorable mention in *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror*), *Daily Science Fiction*, *Caledonia Dreamin'*, *Sensorama*, *Thirty Years of Rain*, *Tales to Terrify*, and *Diabolical Plots*. When not writing or doing science, she can be found stravaigin the world, cooking, or hiking. She has only started one lab fire.

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