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A Letter from the Editor

Two years of Ghost Light Lit. Four wonderful issues. What a joy and privilege it is to be able to share these incredible pieces with the world. The 38 contributors who make up the contents of this issue created works that are as haunting as they are beautiful. Frightening as they are breathtaking.

of myths & monsters blends mythology, horror, and folklore. But it's more than the stories themselves— it's the mythological metaphors and the idea of the monsters that form and shape our world that make these pieces so gripping.

If this is the first issue you've read from Ghost Light Lit, welcome to the family. If this is your second, third, or fourth, we are so happy that you've come back for more. We need you. The writing community needs you. The world needs you.

Enjoy the myths & monsters, some familiar and some brand new, that you'll find within these pages. Ghost Light Lit is honored to have brought their stories to life.

With love,

Rachael Lord

Editor-in-Chief, Ghost Light Lit

We Have Become Myths and Legends

By Deryck N. Robertson

I once paddled ships with Argonauts
and fought minotaurs and hydras.

Yet no epic tales were written
of those adventurous days.

I did not pull a sword from a stone
to become king of any castle.

But there was an enchantress who
told us of our future.

And we had stories
written in the stars.

The Garden of Persephone's Girlhood

By Molly Arabella Kirk

"he wonders what to call this place.

First he thinks: The New Hell. Then: The Garden.

In the end, he decides to name it

Persephone's Girlhood." - Louise Glück

He planted me a garden, Hell's Eden, he calls it,
a soft corner of life, hand grown by death.
Placed a marital bed amongst cherished blooms,
used waning candles to substitute sunlight. After

his first touch, my place of genesis, the garden died.
I never met his eye, asphodel petals spilling down my cheeks,
watched the helpless blossoms rot, turning acrid against
my skin, caressed by night, stained by decay like lily pollen.

Torn fabric hangs off protruding bone, shivers in my armor.
Kneeled bare, praying on bloody limbs by the Styx's mirror,
once-daughter meets now-woman, baptized in shadow.
An offering of flesh torn down from girlhood's pedestal.

Strewn hypnotised beneath him amongst newly wilted petals,
pomegranates, now all that remain of my sleeping garden,
unexpected, cursed fruit. Stark pinpricks amongst the ruins,
ripe blood stains in a gnarled, barren patchwork cloth.

Crowned ripe, swollen bellies, impregnated and eager,
ready to be broken-wide, opened and consumed. Spilling
handfuls of sticky, oozing entrails onto jagged rocks,
glinting scarlet teardrops, cradled in my soft bare palms.

Popping the seeds in sharp stinging bursts, death's kiss,
a kiss full of teeth, juice bleeding down both our chins.
Building myself a crown of thorns, stones and twigs,
claiming my control over the eternal moonless night.

Medusa Rewrites Her Story

By Veronica Tucker

Cass wasn't supposed to be the one covering the event. Her editor called it a curiosity filler, something to toss between hard news and restaurant openings. The speaker was a myth scholar turned viral sensation. One of those reclaim-your-story types, all silken trauma metaphors and glowing candles. TED talk energy with the soft menace of incense curling through marble.

But the original writer bailed at the last minute, and Cass had nothing better to do. She told herself it would be good for a laugh. Just another spectacle dressed in metaphor.

The theater was full by the time she arrived. Outside, a dense hush clung to the crowd. No phones. No chatter. Everyone stood still, as if waiting for something sacred or irreversible. Their clothes were clean but muted. They looked like they had dressed for a funeral no one had died in yet.

Inside, the air was sticky with salt and dim. Velvet chairs. Coiled gold detailing that might have been vines, but closer looked like snakes. The stage held no props. Just a single podium and, behind it, a large, angled mirror. The kind you might find in a ballet studio, except this one reflected the audience, not the speaker.

The program was printed on thick parchment paper. Cass skimmed it.

“I am not your monster. I am your mirror. - Dr. Dusa Vey”

She had watched Dusa Vey's clips online. The woman was beautiful in that unsettling, untouchable way. Her voice carried the kind of weight Cass couldn't explain, and her audience always looked dazed. Staring. Silently enraptured. The comment sections were worse. Dozens of short phrases: *She sees you. I remember now. I was never alone.*

Cass made a note.

Cult energy. Check comment timestamps. Possible bot farming?

The lights dimmed.

Silence fell, so complete it felt deliberate.

Dusa Vey stepped onto the stage.

She didn't enter so much as emerge. The gown she wore shimmered between green, blue, and oil black, as though the fabric could not settle on a single truth. Her hair was a waterfall of obsidian curls, too thick and perfect to be natural. She wore no jewelry. No microphone. No shoes.

She placed her hands on the podium. When she spoke, the sound arrived inside Cass's body first, before her ears could catch it.

"Let me tell you a story," Dusa said. "Not the one they sculpted. Not the one they pinned to urns and whispered through gallery halls. Mine."

Cass shifted, but her legs didn't respond the way they should have. She told herself it was nerves. Air conditioning. Too much cold brew.

"I was once a priestess," Dusa said. "Bound to silence. Bound to stone walls and ritual. When I asked for protection, they gave me prophecy. When I asked for justice, they gave me a crown of serpents."

Her tone was calm, but something in the room changed. The breathing around Cass became erratic. Several people inhaled, then forgot to exhale.

"They called me monster," Dusa continued. "But I was sanctuary. They told the world I destroyed. But I was a warning. I turned no one to stone who did not arrive with fire in his hands."

Cass's notebook slipped off her lap without her noticing. Her fingers moved across her thighs like they were searching for something. When she looked up, the mirror behind Dusa had darkened slightly, though the stage lights had not changed. The audience's reflection twitched a moment behind reality. Not a full second. Less. But enough.

"I vanished by choice," Dusa said. "I knew how they would tell it. So I wrote myself into silence. Until now."

Cass tried to write. Her pen didn't move. The page had filled itself with unfamiliar marks, spirals, lines, eyes. One sentence repeated over and over in her own handwriting:
She saw them. She saw them. She saw them.

Dusa leaned closer to the podium. "I don't want your fear. I want your memory."

Her smile stretched slowly. Cass could not look away. In the mirror, her own face flickered, not changed, but something was watching from behind her eyes. Something older. Something amused.

Then came the applause.

It was slow at first, then relentless. The audience stood all at once. Cass remained seated. Several people had tears on their faces. Others smiled too widely. A woman in the third row whispered something to herself over and over in time with her clapping.

Cass tried to stand but her legs gave out for a second. She caught herself on the seat in front of her. The woman next to her turned her head slightly and said, with quiet certainty, "You'll feel it tonight."

The assistant guided Cass backstage. The hallway was narrow, painted theater black, but the air smelled like seawater left too long in stone. One mirror hung near the door, warped at the corners. Cass waited.

Her notes were unreadable. The notebook seemed wet at the edges, though it hadn't touched anything. Her fingers trembled. She felt warm, then cold. Then nothing.

Dusa appeared with no sound.

She wore loose black clothing now. Her hair was still damp-looking. Her bare feet made no noise on the wood floor.

"You're braver than most," Dusa said. Her voice was no longer resonant. It was quiet. Still unblinking. "Most writers want spectacle. You stayed through the silence."

"I—" Cass began, then stopped. Her tongue felt heavy. The wrong shape.

Dusa stepped closer.

"I am not here to haunt you," she said. "I let people see. That's all."

She reached out and touched Cass's cheek. Her hand was cool. Cass tried not to flinch, but the feeling lingered too long. Not just cold. Hollow.

Dusa gestured toward the mirror on the wall.

Cass turned toward it. She moved slowly.

Her reflection blinked first.

Her face looked familiar, but something was missing. Her pupils were slits. Her hair was fuller. Her skin was no longer pale but tinged with green at the temples, like algae climbing stone.

“I don’t turn people to stone anymore,” Dusa whispered. “I open the doors.”

Cass left without asking another question.

The night outside buzzed too loudly. Light hurt her eyes. She walked home instead of taking the train. Her reflection followed her in every window, never quite synced.

At home, she sat at her desk and opened her laptop. She tried to remember what she wanted to write, but her fingers typed without her. A single sentence appeared:

Let me tell you who I really am.

She reached up and touched her cheek. It still felt marked.

Another sentence appeared:

They said I was the monster. They never asked what made me that way.

A tap echoed behind her. She turned. The mirror above her bureau had fogged slightly. In the condensation, a handprint bloomed. Small. Slender. Not hers.

She stepped closer.

Her reflection smiled without her.

paging dr. frankenstein

By Macie Hayden

at the grocery store, you buy me fresh pink carnations
and a new box of english breakfast tea bags. i'm wasting
time, i'm screaming over the silence smothering our dirty
bedroom. you're teary-eyed, handing me a fistful of stems
wrapped in plastic and i stuff the petals in my mouth. i chew.
in the operating room, you lie willing on the table like a dog in the sun,
thin flesh absorbing the harsh yellow light pouring out
around you, a halo around your head. you've made a name
for yourself here, gentleness fluttering its paper wings softly
out of your mouth each time it opens, in time with the rise and fall
of your cavernous chest. this world is a misshapen creature
for you to coax out of hiding, so i will make you both
alike in isolation. the blades in my fists
are sharp and clean. steady as a surgeon, i cut
you open, and you bleed. your pain is a polished
silver tray for me to glance at just long enough
to register my face before smearing my palm sweat
across my mirrored wet cheeks. if i ruin you,
will you tear through the world to wreck me?
will you feel the crunch of incubating robin eggs
underneath your feet? it's anything to cloud my eyes
with metal, anything as accident, anything to keep you around.

Screen Light

By K.G. McLeod

The light from his cell phone splashes across his face, illuminating his hollowed features. He knows he is taking a risk; that the shine from his phone will reveal his position in the farmer's field, yet his phone stays on. He hopes the golden crosses of the surrounding canola are tall enough to shield him from his would-be attackers lurking amongst the crops.

He eventually puts the phone down and, unable to fight it, lets out an audible sigh. The adrenaline pouring through his veins just minutes ago has abated following his narrow escape, and his heart rate has returned to its normal cadence. Feeling safe, at least momentarily, his attention turns to a dull pain emanating from his shoulder where he was bitten. He tries to look at the wound but only finds its by-product weeping into his shirt, changing the colour from a dull gray to a copper brown. He reaches to the bloody gash, spurring the pain to new life through his touch. He traces his fingers across the teeth marks left by his neighbor. She took Gordon by surprise as he loaded his car, eager to get his family to a safe zone promised by an authoritative voice over the radio. His family had hidden for days in their house, the blinds shut; waiting for the government, or anyone, to stall the unraveling of society as more and more people transformed into decaying cannibals. Gordon was so overcome at the possibility of escape that he didn't think to look around before entering his garage, never thinking that danger could lurk so close to home.

Once bitten, Gordon used the accompanying surge of adrenaline to grab a nearby shovel and start swinging to keep the zombie at bay. As he fought off his neighbor, more of the undead appeared out of nowhere; lured closer from the sounds of struggle and the promise of fresh meat. All of the intruders were in different states of deformation, as if they were bodies pouring out of a blender. Lost eyes, missing jaws, clothes soaked with blood. He could see his front yard fill with the recently transformed, as if it was an undead block party. His house was moments away from being swarmed. As he fought back the growing horde, swinging the shovel wildly, he looked back to see his wife and daughter in the garage doorway. The sight of his family gave him the mental clarity to do what was needed. He stepped away from his house, towards the road.

He called his family to go inside and lock the door. I'll lead them away, he told his wife. When the coast is clear, drive to the checkpoint like the radio says. I will find you there, he yelled, hoping they wouldn't hear his voice crack.

Gordon threw his car keys onto the roof of the car so that his wife could see them. He looked to his family again, watching the tears rise in his wife's eyes as the gravity of the situation crashed down on

her like a crumbling building. Holding her daughter tightly with the strength of the heartbroken, she slammed the garage door shut and bolted it.

Gordon began waving his hands and yelling to make sure all the cloudy eyes of the surrounding undead were on him. Once he was sure he had their attention, he ran towards the farmer fields running alongside their newly built Edmonton suburb.

Now Gordon is sequestered away in the deep foliage of a crop ripe for harvest, hoping he successfully lured all the dead away so his family could escape. Slumped against a scarecrow put up more to amuse the local kids than to scare away magpies, he surveys his surroundings. He knows this field. The farmer's house is just a few yards away. There is a collection of trucks scattered on the property. Gordon just needs to find the keys for one to get out of here and find his family.

The snap of a rapeseed being crushed underfoot compels Gordon to go rigid. He holds his breath as he sees the shuffling feet of the undead lurching nearby, bending the canola plants aside as the monster moves closer to him. Its hoarse moans are piercing, like an icepick scratching against his eardrums. He stays still and the zombie passes him, not noticing him down near the roots of the canola plants. Gordon waits until the sad creature shambles away. Soon, there is no more movement in the crops, save for that caused by a steady wind. Despite the danger, Gordon again clicks open his phone. The bright shine of the screen acting as a signal to all around him, he knows, but he must look.

Gordon wakes up abruptly. He looks around and is greeted by a new darkness, accompanied by the soft rustling sounds of the canola meeting the wind. Gordon tries to wake from a restless sleep, unclear how long he was out. He picks up his phone from beside him, as if commencing a morning routine. He clicks the side buttons to stir it to life, checking if a signal has returned. There is no signal; there never will be one again. Yet, Gordon's eyes still linger on the screen; only stopping to check his surroundings every few seconds to ensure he is not found. When the screen eventually fades to black, he is overcome by a sharp pounding in his brain, as if a grenade just went off in his head. He is taken by a sudden thirst, yet he doesn't want water. Though his shoulder still hurts, the pain is somehow distant, as if it was happening to someone else's body. Moans arise from the harvest rows beside him; the undead are still here and they are close. Gordon tries to get up to escape to the farmhouse but finds that he has no strength to move.

He sits, because he can do nothing else. His eyes adjust to jilted movements coming from the fortress of canola surrounding him. Illuminated by the draping moonlight, he sees the limping body of a dead

man coming towards him. Gordon knows he needs to run but cannot. His body has accepted its fate, despite his mind's pleas. Gordon can only watch as the undead stranger slowly tilts closer.

As it draws near, Gordon sees the eager look of hunger encased in its curdling skin. It drops down to the ground and pulls itself onto him. Gordon can smell the rotting flesh on its breath. Before the undead sinks its teeth into him, it stops suddenly. The same eyes that were staring at him hungrily have become unfocused; looking at Gordon as if he was just another crop blowing in the wind. The creature lazily lifts itself off Gordon and begins limping back in the direction it came. After a few moments, Gordon is alone again.

Gordon feels his body go cold and rigid, as if rigor mortis was setting into his living joints. His mind throbs as if he was drowning. Though he can barely move his limbs, he uses his last fading moment of lucidity to pick up his phone one last time. He turns on the screen, the battery nearly gone. He leans the phone against his stretched-out leg and stares at the bright light beckoning towards him. He stares at it longingly, as if nothing else in the world mattered more than that display image. He soon finds his eyes losing the ability to focus. The last of his strength collapsing, he slumps over. His body shudders involuntarily until it stops completely.

Gordon's cold body begins to move again. It starts in short creeks and shudders, as if waking from a long sleep. Gordon eventually rises from his spot amongst the harvest, but it is no longer him. His body lifts from the ground, but it is no longer Gordon lifting it. As he rises, the phone falls to the ground from its place tilted against his leg. This sudden movement makes the phone light anew, but Gordon does not notice. On his feet, he shuffles forward through the farmer's field, his soft cries joining the melody of the other undead. His phone, abandoned, lingers alight for just a few more seconds. On it, a picture of a little girl being held in the safety of her mother's embrace is showcased as a background image, the photo concealed only slightly by the phone clock. In this photo, both the girl and her mother smile warmly as sunlight shines down and brightens their features. Behind them is Gordon, a hand on the shoulder of each member of his family. In this photo, he smiles brightly too; effortlessly, as if the camera captured the best day of his life. The three of them stay there, together, locked in this shared moment of content, until the picture wanes and the screen once again fades to black.

To the Werewolf I Loved at Seventeen

By May Garner

You never told me what the moon did to you.
Only that you loved me most in the dark.

Your smile, all boyish ache, morning soft, half-asleep —
but come dusk, you wore teeth like heirlooms,
howled my name into spruce trees that I still remember.

I should have known better than to kiss a throat that flinched
when I prayed, that swallowed their fill when I was hungry.
I should've run when your hands twitched at the sight
of blood, even mine.

Especially mine.

I told myself you were changing for me.
I didn't know that meant into something else.

You came back with bark in your bite,
lamb's breath on your collar,
the arousal of something primal
curling from your flesh.

And still, I let you crawl into my bed,
sugar coat around me like a surrender,
say you didn't mean it this time.

Your hunger never loved me,
but I think your shame did.
I drank apologies from the
same lips that cut me,
from a voice full of fur,
believing you,
because I was *seventeen*
and thought all a monster
needed was love

The Pool Seduces Narcissus

By Jennifer Bullis

You

are the fairest and finest.

Come closer, let me gaze at you, let me
mirror your glorious eyes—azure, more sapphire
than the sky-throne of Zeus. And your heart, more gold
than the visage of Apollo! Let's forge a deal: stay right here
and let me stare at you. I promise you, you will love me back. You
will never need another. Banish all others! You need no other hearts
but yours, and mine, and you have all of mine, are all mine. What's mine
is yours, and what's yours is beauty without compare. I'll steal and kill
for you, everything you could possibly desire. What you want
is already yours, and I have already given it to you.
Believe me, you would never want to lose it.
You have no idea how perfect you are,
how perfect we are
together.

In the Pines

By Nikolaj František & Gaia Kim Bartolini

EXT. HOMESTEAD GARDEN - DAY

The pines sway in a light breeze and the sound of a child at play echoes among the neatly planted rows of crops.

IVY, 7 in a grass-stained sun dress with dirt on her knees, darts out from behind a rain barrel, giggling, though there is no one else around.

IVY
You can't catch me!

More giggles, like a crystalline sound, come from different directions, mimicking Ivy's.

WHISPERS
You can't catch me!

A gust of wind ruffles her hair. A columbine blossom drops in front of her.

IVY
That's not fair.

The giggles are now distant, ahead of her.

IVY (CONT'D)
Wait for me!

Ivy begins to run after the sound, as more blossoms bloom along a path deep into the forest.

The pines swallow Ivy's voice the moment she crosses into the forest.

EXT. DRIVEWAY - EVENING

A truck pulls into the gravel driveway, skirting around some toys scattered along the edge of the path.

It stops and the engine shuts off, but no one emerges for several seconds.

The door opens and out comes JONATHAN, 28 with unkempt brown hair and round glasses, carrying a large pizza box.

JONATHAN
Ivy! Dinner's here.

He fumbles for his keys and heads to the front door. It opens before he can unlock it.

Jonathan kisses ANGELA, 28, on the cheek. She smiles but it doesn't reach her eyes. She looks exhausted.

INT. HOUSE - LATER

Jonathan and Angela walk to the small living room, hand in hand, like teenagers on their first date.

The place is furnished like an old cottage, right from the pages of a Victorian novel.

JONATHAN
How was your day?

ANGELA
Same as any other day. I love to stay home, but sometimes it gets lonely.

Jonathan looks at her, a guilty expression on his face.

JONATHAN
I'm sorry, you sacrificed so much for...

ANGELA
I chose to. I knew when I married you that life wouldn't be the same.

JONATHAN
I wanted to give you the world.

ANGELA
You gave me Ivy, and the house I always wanted, away from the city.

JONATHAN
But you aren't happy.

ANGELA
I am. I'm just also very tired.

On the walls there are pictures of old ladies and gentlemen, dressed in the fashion of the early twentieth century. One gentleman in particular is in almost every picture.

A three piece suit, and a straw hat, but above all well-groomed waxed mustaches.

His face is familiar, like an old friend.

JONATHAN

We really should take this picture
down...

ANGELA

Well, it was his house first, and
you know how much Ivy loves her
great grandfather.

JONATHAN

Speaking of her, where is our
little monster?

ANGELA

Outside, playing by herself like
usual.

JONATHAN

No friends today?

ANGELA

No, not even the imaginary ones.
She asked me about him, and when I
told her the same story, and about
how he became a famous writer, she
ran off again, happy.

JONATHAN

Well, as long as she's happy.

ANGELA

But shouldn't she have some more
real friends? I know it's a drive,
but... Maybe she should go to
school with the other kids her age.

JONATHAN

I never did and I turned out fine.
Otherwise, you wouldn't have moved
out here, would you?

ANGELA

I know, but...

JONATHAN

Let's give it another year, and
then, if you're still worried, we
can give school a try.

Angela's expression is reluctant, but she doesn't answer. Instead, she looks out the open window.

ANGELA

Ivy, come on back, daddy brought
your favorite - pizza!
Nothing moves outside except the pines.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

Ivy? Come inside.

Nothing.

ANGELA (CONT'D)

Ivy, this is not funny.

When the silence continues, Angela and Jonathan leave the pizza on the table and rush outside.

EXT. HOMESTEAD GARDEN - LATER

Angela and Jonathan run outside, worried.

They look around, scanning the garden, but Ivy is not there. Then, at the same time, they turn towards the line of trees.

ANGELA

Ivy! Ivy, come back, baby.

JONATHAN

Ivy!

They run towards the forest and disappear beyond the pines.

EXT. FOREST - LATER

As the sun begins to set and the light gets weaker, Jonathan and Angela frantically look for Ivy.

Their unanswered calls echo in the silence. On the ground Jonathan sees foxgloves - a lot of them.

JONATHAN

No. Not again.

ANGELA

Did you say something? Have you
found anything?

JONATHAN

No. No. I was, I was praying.

The wind carries a crystalline sound of bells. Then it becomes stronger, making it hard for Angela to see as dust is blown in her eyes.

WHISPERS

Liar, liar twisting briars.

JONATHAN

Go back home, Angela. I will keep looking for her here, but someone must be there in case...

ANGELA

What? No.

JONATHAN

What if she comes back? You need to go.

The wind pushes Angela back, too strong now to be resisted.

ANGELA

Jonathan? What's going on?

JONATHAN

Go, now!

As another gust of wind pushes her back, hair blinding her long enough that she doesn't see Jonathan sprint deeper into the forest, where bushes of roses and blackberries are.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Angela paces across the living room, peering out the screen door every time she passes it. Her eyes are red-rimmed and puffy with tears.

She holds the phone so hard the plastic creaks in her hands and her knuckles are white.

INTERCUT

OPERATOR

999 what's your emergency?

ANGELA

Ivy is gone. My baby girl...

OPERATOR

Ma'am? Who is Ivy? Is someone hurt?

ANGELA

My little girl. We can't find her.

OPERATOR

Ma'am, please calm down. Tell me
what happened.

Under the picture of the gentleman with the straw hat, there is now a bunch of forget me nots, scattered around. When Angela notices them, she pales.

ANGELA

We can't find her. She's gone...

Angela grabs the flowers and stomps on them as she keeps talking into the phone, but the words become unintelligible.

EXT. FOREST - NIGHT

Dogs bark. HUNTERS are scouting the area, hounds tight on their leashes.

They pull hard, their slim bodies tense with excitement, feeling the call of the hunt.

MR. HARRISON

They're close.

HUNTER #1

The dogs can smell them already.

MR. HARRISON

I bloody hope so. They are worth
more than my car.

HUNTER #2

That's because you're a cheap
bastard.

MR. HARRISON

You're one to talk.

MATTHEW

I heard something.

The dogs are in a frenzy. The wind, even if not as strong as before, makes them nervous.

MR. HARRISON

They're too nervous, like they
don't know where to point.

HUNTER #1

It's just us and the bloody foxes.
No one is crazy enough to stay out
with this weather.

MATTHEW

Fairy weather. We shouldn't be
here.

MR. HARRISON

If I hear another word of your
nonsense, Matthew, I will
personally kick your ass back to
London.

MATTHEW

They aren't nonsense. My
grandmother saw them.

MR. HARRISON

Your grandmother would see the
Queen herself after a couple of
pints at the pub.

A nervous laugh breaks through the other sounds of the group and they proceed, flashlights pointed ahead to see.

Mr. Harrison's hound stops, sniffs the air and then pulls hard enough the leash slips from his owner's hand and starts running.

MR. HARRISON (CONT'D)

Bloody hell.

He chases after the hound, and everyone else follows.

EXT. DEEP IN THE FOREST - LATER

The forest is dark, and the silence is broken by the sounds of the hunters crashing through the brush and the baying of their hounds as they all but drag their owners behind them.

Without paying attention, Mr. Harrison crushes mushrooms and flowers under his heavy boots, breaking the neat ring they once formed.

MR. HARRISON

Chester. Come back here, you
bloody...

He stops, frozen on the spot.

Ensnared in brambles at the edge of the meadow is Ivy, shivering and crying. Chester has already reached her side and licks her face.

MR. HARRISON (CONT'D)
Good heavens, what are you doing
all the way...

He rushes forward to disentangle Ivy from the thorny branches and vines. She sobs wordlessly, hiccupping and clutching her rescuer when she's free of the plant.

They're both covered in cuts from the thorns, which seem reluctant to give up their quarry, and Chester continues to bark and growl at them.

MR. HARRISON (CONT'D)
Hunt is over for tonight. Let's
take Miss Conan Doyle home.

Matthew, the last to arrive, looks around and gets pale when he sees the crushed ring.

When no one pays attention to him, he takes a shiny new penny from his pocket and leaves it behind.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Angela is still pacing. When she looks up at the pictures on the wall she stops.

The photograph of the man in the straw hat has accumulated more flowers growing out from under the frame.

She frowns and reaches out to touch them. Before she can, headlights flash through the door.

A car skids to a stop beside Jonathan's, and the door swings open. Dogs bark from the bed of the truck, and Mr. Harrison stumbles out.

She opens the door, worried.

ANGELA
Scott? What are you...

EXT. DRIVEWAY - NIGHT

Mr. Harrison hurries to open the back door. Ivy gets out unsteadily, wrapped in Mr. Harrison's coat.

As soon as she sees Ivy, Angela falls on her knees and cries, her arms stretched out to her.

ANGELA
Ivy! Ivy, Oh my God. You're okay.
My baby.

She keeps crying, and all she cares about is holding Ivy as tightly as she can.

Mr. Harrison looks on with tears in eyes.

The other hunters pile out of the truck. Matthew is the only one who stays inside.

EXT. DEEP IN THE FOREST - AT THE SAME TIME

Jonathan is lost and the forest is pitch dark. He stumbles over raised roots, loses his balance, falls, but keeps going on.

His face is dirty, and there is a bit of blood on his cheeks and hands, where thorns and twigs hit him.

JONATHAN

Ivy! Ivy, where are you?

The echoes of his calls break the silence of the night, but no answer comes.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Ivy, it's me, it's Daddy.

He keeps walking deeper into the forest, hoping for an answer that still doesn't come.

He stumbles over tree roots and nearly falls again but catches himself. When he stands upright, he freezes.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Ivy?

There, in front of him, appearing from nowhere, stands Ivy. She's pale, and fragile looking, like she had been waiting for weeks to be found.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)

Ivy? Are you okay baby girl?

She doesn't answer.

Jonathan moves a step forward but then stops and really looks around.

She stands in the middle of a circle of flowers and mushrooms.

He stumbles back a few steps. She stretches her arms out but still doesn't talk.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
No. You're not Ivy.

She looks at him, sad for a moment, her arms drop to her sides. Then she smiles with too many teeth.

JONATHAN (CONT'D)
Oh God. He was right. It was all
real...

Jonathan turns and runs away as terror makes his steps unsteady.
INT/EXT. HOUSE - NIGHT

Jonathan runs without turning back. Blindly he rummages in his pockets for the keys. His hands are so shaky he comes close to dropping them.

At the second attempt, he finds the lock and finally enters the house.

He slams the door behind him and locks it, making sure nothing could come in.

Angela rushes to him.

ANGELA
Jonathan, she's back. They found
her.

Jonathan is so pale he looks like he's seen a ghost.

JONATHAN
They? Who's they?

Ivy rushes to him and hugs his legs.

IVY
Daddy, you're back.

She holds a bunch of forget me not in her hands, now a bit crushed, but fresh.

Outside the wind howls.

Inside the crystalline giggle of many voices that sound like bells.

END

Bird of the Between

By Zary Fekete

I found him near the alder roots, wind-tossed and whimpering, a scrap of feather and bone too proud to beg. His eye caught mine...not pleading, not wild...just... ancient. Like a curse. Like a gift.

The Turul, they say, is a bird that flew before language. Carved into cliffs, sewn into flags, he chooses rulers and carries dreams in his talons. But what ruler limps under birch leaves, bleeding quietly into snowmelt? What sovereign lets a girl cup him in trembling hands and wrap his wing with thread?

I sat beside him each day, offering crusts and quiet. He took both. The wind never touched us. I whispered things: my father's silence, the ache behind my knees, the way the stars look like undone buttons when I cry.

Once, he blinked slowly. I felt his eyes behind mine.

They told me not to name him. Not to tether wild things. But already he was stitched into my shadow. Already he was coiled under my ribs.

Other birds have flown these stories.

The Phoenix immolates, but is reborn...always alone, always ash-slicked and gleaming.

The Simurgh lives at the edge of all things, cradling kings and madmen alike, waiting to be believed in.

The Garuda devours serpents and carries prayers in the folds of his wings.

And the Turul? He appears to the ones who do not seek him. He waits in the breath between asking and being asked.

He grew stronger. One morning, he beat his wings and the dust lifted from the porch like in spring-time. He looked at me. Not like a pet looks, not even like a god looks...but like a mirror might look, after years of being covered.

"You may go," I said, though he did not need my permission.

He did not bow, or cry, or burst into fire.

He flew.

Not high, not far. Just enough to prove the sky would have him back.

And my heart...my pale, ordinary heart...cracked like a seed. I watched him until he was wind-shaped and vanishing.

Some say I imagined him. But the porch still smells like cedar and breath. My fingers still curl around an invisible pulse.

In dreams, I sometimes see feathers falling, and each one has a name.

Simurgh. Phoenix. Dove. Turul.

Bird of the between. Wing of the unseen. Friend of the forgotten.

They land softly in my palms.

I let them go.

Hades to Demeter: Split Custody

By Amber Watson

I can't say I don't get jealous.
After all, you always have her
in the sunlight. You are not there
on the bleakest nights when her longing
for your light freezes over
and shuts me out. Preserved
like a dream in a distorted haze,
you are yellow daffodils in bloom,
and she rises eagerly each spring
to greet you with new hope
before the facade fades
and she must return to the cold truth
that she does not fully belong
to one world or the other.
I welcome her return, always
in darkness—my winter child,
lovely sliver of daylight descending
once again into these lonely shadows.

On the Expiration of Daylight Savings Time

By Dan Berick

In the spring, old Father Time
will hide his grey face out of sight,
and blend into the shadows
that the trees cast at the margin
of the sunshine on the grass,
as we push our clocks ahead to claim
our one-hour-longer days
and languid velvet twilights.

In autumn, with the falling leaves,
he sees us roll that hour back
and bask in what we think we've gained:
an hour (perhaps) of extra sleep.

Now Father Time will show himself
and smile as the dead leaves blow.
He knows how soon his turn will come
To repossess that borrowed hour,

and every other hour.

Villian-elle #1: Hannibal Lecter

By Golda Grais

The detective sits in the chair across from mine,
sinking into the cushion like a fly in nice Chianti.
The mouth I feel tonguing the wine

is not my own. Elbows greased and chilled spine
simmered for hours, an aroma of Basil, Rose, Mary.
The detective sits in the chair across from mine

and talks about his job, blood-soaked and anodyne.
His tongue sears with uncorked memory,
the mouth I feel tonguing the wine.

A conversation is the richest dish on which to dine,
words exchanged and swallowed into a good story.
The detective sits in the chair across from mine

and I take pleasure on the meat of his thigh,
sawing back and forth. Wounded moans fall candied
from the mouth I feel tonguing the wine.

Maillard glances scorch us caramelized
and cursed, falling on an inevitable trajectory:
the detective who sits in the chair across from mine,
and the mouth I feel tonguing the wine.

Medusa

By Elizabeth Hogarth

It was the final straw
words pelting like hot ash,

pressure coiled,

growing,

growing,

Into a violent explosion of snakes
rapidly slithering from my skull.

An eight faced monster,
hissing a symphony of anger.

Sixteen beady eyes seeing you,
judging.

I would ask for your defense
but you've been encased in stone
(much like your heart).

Your expression forever frozen,
in the exact moment you realized -

I'm stronger than you.

Ghost to Ghost

By Mario Duarte

Luck is a ghost.
Someone I cannot touch.
Or barely see.

My hand reaches through
his torso—he does not
wince or cry out.

Was it always this way?

Into his face, I lean,
but his eyes stare
beyond me—to what?

“Why don’t you ever
kiss me” I ask,
“or hold me close?”

Luck frowns, grins.
His translucent hands
twist his hair into horns.

“I am what you are,” he sneers.

Forget him. Who’s he to walk
through me and into
a field of sunflowers—
heads bending with light.

The Hollow Pool

By Jenny Gaitskell

First leaves falling in the crooked woods, more mottled than golden. Robin swallows his song. That stench from the hollow again. Fruitless brambles catching at my coat all the way down. No path, but a trail. Food wrappers sucked and spat out. Muddy picture book, gutted. Umbrella, deboned. Shoe with empty eyeholes and tongue ripped out.

My beast is here, but one foot in front of the other. Nettles shiver, same as last time. Sludge stirs like a slow uncoiling. She makes me itch in crevices.

Call her ancestral fear. Slipped from ancient shadows, tongue to ear through dark ages, sidewinding from medieval margins into folk tales, to nest deep in shared memory and my mind. Breathed on my neck in childhood bed. Spits my dirtiest secrets in the sweated small hours. Say it.

“There’s nothing to be afraid of.”

Shaky, but a start. Name five things I can see.

Fallen alder (safety zone). Muscular ripples cross the mire, long and serpentine as those old tales. Foul water lapping up a birch, which groans against neighbours. Clot by my welly of fur and little broken bones. Don’t panic. Speak the words.

“It’s only a story.”

Once upon a time, local folk made their local serpent great as a timber and noisome too. Then they stretched her. Their serpent left trails, they gave her ever-renewing teeth and sinews, perpetual hunger, and bottomless pools to lurk in. They even gifted her speech, kept her talking for centuries. Bet she’s glad to be left alone. Listen.

Canopy and undergrowth rustle. A hidden trickle and wet hiss, felt in quills. My heart knock-knocking.

“Who’s there?”

Question marks glide across murk, sink with a plop. Greenish filth splatters the alder, specks my front with slurry stink. Aw, heck. Call that a trick of the shade, or windfall, call that fairy mischief. Just don’t call it quits. What’s the worst thing about courage?

“Can’t be brave until you’re afraid.”

And I am so tired of afraid. Waking frightened, eating, walking and talking it. Unable to explain it. Have to face her.

Lucky bunch, ye olde locals, having a shared monster to blame. Knew where she was, what she wanted. Not their fault and nothing to be done but send for a hero.

Supposed to become our own heroes, these days. Teach ourselves the knack.

How to kill a mythical beast. With lance, a sword, poisoned pudding. Whichever’s to hand. If not, shrink her to a tiddler with a blessing. Or stand up to her, at the very least.

“Just this once.”

Boot’s width of squelch between the alder and the pool’s wash. Short skid into a folk tale. Cautionary version. Woman in her woods, alone. Drawn by reflections to murky waters. Shifty and sucking eddies and swirls. Meanwhile, Serpent’s licking her pearlies.

Hey. My monster, my story.

So, tell it!

“I am not bloody scared.”

Serpent sees that, indeed, I refuse to fear her. And, for the first time in centuries, she is not hungry. Serpent is grateful for this, but tradition demands she proceed with atrocities.

“Not this time.”

For I know how Serpent was made. I tell her, look, you have no teeth nor sinews. And Serpent sinks into mud. I tell her, in fact, you’re a figment. This is Serpent’s dirtiest secret. She feels all her greatness falling away through bottomless dark, all her noisomeness too. With a last hiss, she asks, will I never return?

“Hush.”

The pool’s a confusion of currents, dapples and droplets, strange reflections. Here I am. Living. Not happily ever after, but for the moment, unafraid. This heartbeat I could dance to. Leaves spiral down, some mostly golden. Up in the brambles, robin starts again. His love song to autumn. A little wistful, not too sweet.

Monsters Anonymous

By Stephanie W. Koreneff

I'm not a monster.

I tell myself this as I hug the deepest shadows of the alley and watch the humans walk by. I smell the tang of their blood on the breeze. My mouth waters. I close my eyes, hold my breath.

I can't afford a mistake—one slipup and the Monsters Council will have enough reason to tie me up and set me in the sunlight until my skin sizzles and chars and my dying cries no longer echo through the city. Monsters Anonymous was the council's way of trying to rehabilitate me—*me*, a creature who has survived on human blood for centuries! All because this new generation believes even monsters can become productive members of society.

But old habits die hard, and I'd laugh if I wasn't trying desperately to hold onto what little self-control I have left. I dig my nails into the cold brick behind me as a group of raucous teenagers bound by, laughing and jostling each other, unaware of the danger just a breath away.

No. Not a danger. Not anymore.

I'm not a monster.

I gasp an involuntary breath, catching the fresh scent of young blood. The best blood. My nostrils flare, my pupils dilate, sharpening my vision in this dark alley that hides my struggle, that holds my secrets tight like a poker player with a bad hand. The counselor at Monsters Anonymous said we needed to face our demons eventually, and I've been without human blood for two months. I have done my best to live on the artificial blood they give me. I have done my best to play by the rules, to placate this new generation. But two months can't undo what feels like an eternity.

I

think

I'm

slipping.

I choke back a growl and whirl away from the end of the alley, disappearing further into the shadows. This was a bad idea. A terrible idea. Once I reach my apartment in the government slums,

I'm not leaving. I'll lock my doors and hold my breath when my next meal delivery arrives. I'll take all the empty alleys to my next MA meeting. I won't think about this night and the insane desire clawing at my insides. I won't–

I skid to a stop. The air is thick with the scent of human blood. My knees almost buckle, but I grab the dumpster next to me, denting the metal with the force of my grip. The alley tilts off kilter; the shadows, my one-time friends, scrape over my skin, burning like the sunlight until I locate the source of this unbearable scent: a man. Suddenly the world snaps and everything rights itself. I see the details too clearly: the cell phone in his hand, the glow illuminating the outline of his jaw, thumbs tapping rapidly across the screen. He leans sideways against a building, a cigarette smoldering between two fingers.

My tongue dances across my fangs. It could be quick. He wouldn't have time to scream. His life would flow over my tongue quicker than he could draw his next breath.

I

step

closer.

I'm not a monster. I'm not a monster.

I can't. I shouldn't. But my feet don't stop. They propel me forward. I repeat the mantra in my head, allowing it to take on a new meaning.

I'm not a monster I'm–

Right behind him. I'm not a monster because I won't make him suffer. I'm not a monster just because I'll go to my next meeting and pretend this never happened.

I'mnotamonsterI'mnotamonster

The man's primal instincts seem to kick in. He looks up. The cell phone illuminates the curve of his neck, the perfect place to sink my teeth into. I have to make my choice, or he'll turn around and scream. Fear of what lurks in the dark hasn't been entirely erased from humankind. He will know what I am (*i'mnotamonster*). He will know what I have come for.

I have to disappear, but I don't move. I'm starving. I feel like I haven't eaten in years. Like I will

shrivel up and die if I don't taste blood. Real blood.

He begins to turn and I open my mouth and my fangs extend and I'm not a monster. Not by choice. The Monsters Council made me into one. I didn't ask for this life, for these rules that cage me in. I didn't want to live forever and say goodbye to my loved ones until I had no one left. My very existence is monstrous. Not because of who I am. Because of what they made me.

He turns

and

sees me.

I don't need the cell phone light to see the fear that sparks in his eyes (*notamonster*). He takes a sharp intake of air and in that quiet moment between his breath and his scream, I make my choice.

The Fates

By Olivia Peters-Rivera

On another plane, perhaps
in another time, overlaid
with this one sit three
ancient beings along
the verge of a timeless well.
They carve small slips
of Ash, then lay each flat
against the great gnarling
roots of a primordial tree.

Each sliver of wood
holds the life path of beast
and bird, each human being
every planet and even
the Earth, just one of so many
immeasurable worlds.
These figures take the shape
of young women and old
women, faces wrinkled

like sun-dried mud flats, faces
smooth as still water, hair
silver, bronze, gold, ink-black.
The first, she carves histories
of an unfathomable universe,
the second, she carves The Great
Unfolding and the third
most mysterious, she carves that
which has not yet come to pass.

In perpetuity they carry on
and on, these carvers of fate
older than the eldest stone
older still than the eldest god.

Connections

By Helen Patrice

Hera – Zeus, my love, my love.

Zeus – Hera, there can never be just you.

Zeus – Europa, Beautiful milky girl, flowing girl, come over the sea with me.

Zeus – Crete. Ah, blessed isle, our haven.

Europa – Crete. A good place to hide.

Hera – Europa. I thought I dreamed.... but no, He would not betray me yet again.

Zeus – Hephaestus. Brother, build me a guardian, a man of metal.

Hephaestus – Zeus. Of course, Ruler and Brother.

Hephaestus – Talos. Come to life, man of metal. Guard well, live while the vein of ichor runs through you.

Talos – Crete. My island. Mine.

Zeus – Talos. Guard her well.

Talos – Zeus. I obey, Master.

Talos – Europa. Tiny woman creature human, no bigger than a flea, I am to guard you.

Europa – Talos. I am afraid. Stay far from me.

Europa – The ocean. So wide, so wide.

Talos – The ocean. Keep your pirates and sailors far from us. Touch me not, for I am of metal.

The ocean – Talos. I hunger for all things metal. My salt and tides would eat you.

Europa – The ocean. My family....

The ocean – Europa. I am wide.

Europa – My loneliness. Three sons. Queen of Crete. Alone.

Loneliness – All. I can rust you out.

Good. Grieve, Bakunawa

By Nico Penaranda

In Filipino Mythology, the Bakunawa was a sea serpent who ate six out seven of Earth's moons

Doesn't your belly ache, Bakunawa? How many more Moons will it take
to grind down your grief?

Your sister was the largest of the leatherbacks. It was said she could swallow half the shore.
Your lover—strange even among the painted ones. She stained her arms in emulation

of your scales. They were your kindred. What tethered you from ocean, land, and sky,
but then both of them died.

So for a while, no one glanced as you raged. After all, who doesn't need to crack
their teeth on the hard parts of the sky?

At least the sharpness of iron tastes better than the dullness of life without love,
but it's really dark now, Bakunawa.

It's you that folks are rattling their pans at. They just want to protect theirs too.
Grief should not just be ground. So please, unclench your jaw.

Cough up the rubble inside of you. Return to the vastness
of all that you already were. Until then,

I'll hold your hair.

I'll rub your back.

Beira, the Cailleach

By Chandra Gair

Once she was young and beautiful (because all youth is beautiful)
and she was vain.

She flaunted her pretty white plaid
before her sisters, for their frocks were plain.

But hers would not be chores for soft hands and splendid robes:
hauling boulders, laying down these mountains,
hammering out these glens, lochs and corries — sparks flying —
carving out gorges and setting rivers to flow.
To flow cold and pristine, and replenish the sea.

And she lost her youth, her beauty (because everyone does, in the end)
and she was maimed.

She weaved crystal webs, sent strong gales
to snuff hearth fires like candle flames.

But she would clean her dusty cloak in coastal waters:
turning down the light for modesty's sake,
plunging her plaid into salty waters — foam whirling —
then laying the clean plaid, resplendent, o'er hills to dry,
To dry in the cold night, and paint the mountains white.

She thirsted for sweet refreshment (because we all need hydration)
and she was wan.

Her hands, calloused, rough and rugged
as the land she wrought, reached towards the loch.

But in that still pond, she would spot an interloper:
A hoary-haired, icy-blue, one-eyed crone,
recoiling in horror; she did the same — gorge rising —
then leaning o'er the loch, her claw extends to touch,
To touch the hag's cold claw, and ripple the water.

That day she wept for her lost youth (because it was gone forever)
Now she is seethin'.
She is Beira, Queen of Winter,
The Hag commands respect, so *'coorie in.'*

Frozen

By Louis Faber

In the glacial heart of the night
the gods, cast out from Olympus,
are ghostly faces on a mottled sky.
They peer down on the angry sea
of people erecting cathedrals
of emotional ice, unbreeched fortresses.
It wasn't supposed to be this way,
not what the gods intended, not
what they imagined for their
well-ordered universe, each
from his, her assigned realm.
But their followers grew tired,
shifted perspectives, demanded
a freedom they could not comprehend,
could not contain, could not share.
So they wander through the maze
searching for an exit, searching
for nirvana, searching for love,
unwilling to give, to offer, to bestow.
The gods are resigned to their fate,
the Fates are resigned to emptiness,
the people are resigned to
a self-imposed solitude that
teeters on the edge of madness.

Sealskin

By Rachael Hill

They thought her foreign, with her heavy limbed
gait and driftwood face; thought it strange she kept

small stones and bones from the shingle, hung thick
seaweed braids at the door, how their waxy

skinned children trailed her in a fin, webbing
tucked into cuffs. They gave sallow silence,

sideways glances, traded twittered versions
among themselves: how she came from *elsewhere*,

how he found her washed up at the cove, tricked
her, pinned her wild heart to his sleeve. They said

she found the skin buried behind the house.
Said he couldn't leave the sea once she'd gone.

That only his hat and a row of small
somber shoes were found on the crusty shore.

A Tangle of Snow and Scarlet

By Sarah R. New

The vampire had not always been this way.

She had been a young girl once. It had been a long time since she had felt the touch of sun on her bare skin, or since she had played with her younger sister with no fear of hurting her. But that had been a long time ago now, so long ago that she could barely remember.

She was never supposed to live this life. She had expected to be married off as a teenager to a young man in her medieval village, to bear children and die at a sensible age, a grown-up age. She had expected to make it past her teenage years, and to fall in love and to live. In her little village the vampyr had always been a myth, although Galos the baker's son had sworn he saw one in the forest once. Her mother had tutted and convinced her young daughters that Galos was lying, and that there was no such things as vampyrs. And the young girl initially believed her, until her father went into the forest to catch game one day and never came back.

She didn't even really remember how her own death had happened, not really, not clearly. You would think that something as momentous as this would be indelibly ingrained into your memory forever, but she just couldn't entirely recall. She remembered how it had been in the dead of winter. If she closed her eyes and focused really hard, she could feel the frost biting at her cheeks, see the snow dusting the forest trees by her childhood home, touch the coarse furs she was wrapped in to stave off the cold. And when she opened her eyes, she saw the man, frothing at the mouth, half feral, stalking towards her.

White snow. Paling skin. Scarlet blood.

The young girl was no longer a young girl after that moment. It was not just her mortality that had been stolen from her that day, but her innocent childhood. After that day her eyes had opened and all she knew was to run.

Run, run, run.

And she had run away for many centuries, always watching, always there. She had tried to create a new family for herself time after time, never learning her lesson, always ending the same way. Old age, or fear, or blood. They would never say, but she didn't begrudge them. She would never blame them,

even if they hurt her. They never could stay, and that was not their fault.

She attempted to ignore the pain and to live with her loneliness, and as the years and decades and centuries passed, all those oh so human emotions would die down, and she finally considered herself no longer human. She didn't understand them anymore. It was a wonder to her that she ever had. They were so ...quaint, she thought to herself while observing them, so concentrated on trivial issues and things that ultimately would not matter and their own self-importance. They were funny, so anxious to live as much as they could before their pitiful little hearts burnt out. They could not understand true pain; to live a thousand lives alone, to be left by everyone and anyone you had ever love, to fall asleep a young girl in the snow and wake up a monster in a scarlet tinged world you had no idea existed.

So, could you blame her for convincing you to walk into his dark mansion that you don't remember stepping in to? Can't you empathize with how fearful and alone she must have felt for so many years? Don't you feel empathetic? She's all alone, after all.

Now you've sat here and heard her dark tale, dear reader, will you be the one to stay with her eternally?

Digging for Divinity

By Luke Cohoon

all the poems are singing again, but it's been so many years,
 you confused a dirge for a love song.
 he thought himself myth-born, prophecy eyed and slayer of monsters.
 but imagine there was no hero in this story. imagine he was just another beast
 masquerading as a man.
 if that's the ending, call this a greek tragedy. call this apollo's broken lyre,
 elysian fields in flames and, somewhere, the ambrosia is spoiling.
 if that doesn't seem fair, you can't be blamed,
 you're just the writer.

*how do you teach an old god new tricks?
 have him fall in love.*

you think he took you gorgon, labyrinth chased you down,
 gave you the sweetest offerings; honeyed figs, golden leaves,
 hands like pickaxes.
 but all the animals have left the garden and now he's the one
 digging through the dirt.
 or is that you? fingernails cracked, calloused hands bleeding,
 uncovering some piece of your own anatomy that shudders in the light.
 swing the pickaxe & the earth opens for you.
 swing the pickaxe & no more dancing in flickering dawn.
 swing the pickaxe & now he's lost his holy touch.

he hit you so hard that you forgot what you wanted,
 but you won't worship another man, mortal or divine.

*what do archeologists and poets have in common?
 they both unbury things better left alone.*

I Hear You Calling

By Megan Diedericks

I've been calling out your name in my dreams,
hoping your almost-shadow mutates
into a face I could uphold, unfold
into.

Your presence is a glitch in the system;
a blue light mirage turned lucid hallucination—
I cannot live knowing
four walls need breaking
and all I need to break
them is to lose my mind completely.

I can hear you calling, even now:
your voice as distant as it is close;
I long for your love and unbeating
heart—
I fear I won't listen when
flesh and bone tries to pull me up
from the underworld.

Don't Look Back

By Print Cheng

Don't look back.

Walk quickly, but don't run. If you run, your mind will break.

Don't look back.

Stale water drips a steady rhythm from the low-hanging stalactites above your head. Gravel crunches beneath your feet, careful and hesitant. The walls of the cavern seem to press inward as you walk, threatening to close around you. The torch in your hand flickers, casting a ghastly glow just far enough to see a few steps ahead of where you tread.

You think you hear the low hum of a woman's voice behind you, sending a shiver down your spine. It settles deep in your chest, pulled taut against your pounding heart like the skin of a drum. She's following you, you're sure of it. Through the winding twists and turns in the path, through narrow crevices and jagged rocks that protrude from the ground. You try to pretend she's not there, though it certainly seems that way most of the time.

The temptation isn't worth it. You don't need to check. Just keep moving forward. You have to focus on your journey ahead. You have to get out of here. You must escape.

You can't hear footsteps behind you.

Don't look back.

You sing to yourself, an attempt at a comforting tune to ease the dread in your soul. Something familiar, something light. But a haunting melody creeps out from the depths instead, crying out in an aching lament. Your wavering voice rings out alone, drowning out what little noise that may be lurking in the dark. The sound scatters, rattling against stone, reaching out in the hollow nothingness around you. You strain your ears, as if anticipating a response. But there's only the whistle of wind, the faint scuttling of insects crawling up the cavern walls. The reverberations of the tune peters out. Stay alert. Silence helps you hear.

The wind picks up, and you feel a cold presence brush against your arm. Then another. And another. Rushing past, forlorn whispers echoing in the empty air. Their low murmurs trickle past your ears.

"It's hopeless."

"You'll never make it."

"You're alone."

"You're not alone."

"Turn around."

Your head starts to turn towards the voices, but your mind screams louder. You snap back forward, gritting your teeth. Keep. Moving. Forward.

You try to distract yourself. Think about warmth. Think about open grass fields, golden sunlight peeking over the horizon. There's no musty smell of lichen and stone, it's clean linen and fine silks. The sweet nectar of freshly picked fruit lingers on your tongue as a tender melody waits eagerly to be sung. The warmth of a gentle hand in yours, a soft breeze cascading delicate white flower petals above you. Babbling brooks and soft laughter, the chirping of songbirds atop rustling trees. The harsh snap of a tree branch. The thud of pursuing footsteps in the distance. The hissing of snakes...

No. Not that. It doesn't matter, not anymore. The creeping sense of someone watching you lingers, crawling up the back of your neck. But your eyes are fixed resolutely in front of you, the torch burning brightly in your hand. You *will* make it out of here.

Don't look back.

You arrive at a crossroads, both paths enveloped in pure darkness. A cloaked figure emerges from the shadows. Beckoning you with a tall walking stick riddled with deformed knobs and splintered wood. He waits for you.

Follow him. You have done so once before. And you will die if you don't.

Steeling your resolve, you nod and approach the figure. He turns, the tail of his long black cloak swishing silently behind him as he glides forth, into the path on the right and leading the way. He turns occasionally, gesturing at loose rocks and wet patches in the path to watch your step. You wish you had that freedom. Biting your lip, there's a metallic taste in your mouth as you clear your throat.

"Is she still behind me?" you ask, fear dripping out of every word that trembles from your lips.

The corners of the man's scarred and decayed mouth curl upwards. He laughs, a cold shrill sound that echoes through the cavern and rattles your teeth while he slowly taps his chin with a gnarled finger. "I cannot say."

An eternity passes within the span of minutes, your quiet footsteps close behind the guide's. Your mind wanders, wondering whether or not another set of footsteps still follow yours. Your blood runs cold at the thought. But at last the path widens, and the cloaked figure stops. Without a word, he bids you farewell, melting back into the shadows before your eyes. He can only take you so far, the rest you must walk alone.

Don't look back.

The path is steeper now, with large boulders you carefully climb over. Your palms grow slick with sweat. As you climb over one of the eroded rocks, the torch in your hand slips from your grasp, falling into one of the pools of stagnant water and extinguishing with a stark hiss. The pit of your stomach plummets as the darkness encroaches in, consuming you whole. You fumble in the endless void, feeling the rough texture of stone beneath your fingers. As your eyes adjust to the dark, you spot a glimmer in the distance, a breeze sweeping past. But as you take a step forward, you hear it. A few paces behind you, the panicked wail of your name.

Your name, your name. Oh, it echoes everywhere. Against the coarse walls of the cavern, swirling deep within the recesses of your mind. Helpless, pleading, begging you to please turn around just this once. You can hear her, she knows you can. Look at her.

You can't. Your eyes sting with tears, threatening to spill. Still refusing to acknowledge the imperceptible presence behind you, you clench your teeth, waiting a few moments before marching forward again.

It's silent the rest of the way.

Don't look back.

You can see the faint glow of light up ahead, growing brighter with every step. You're almost there. You're almost home.

Your heart beats with trepidation. At last, your journey will end soon. You came so far, it will all be worth it in the end. You can almost taste the tantalizing fresh air mere steps ahead. Visions of celebration for your return dance before your eyes. The songs you will sing, the melodies you will play, enchanting all who praise your courage and dedication. You will be free soon. But...

She's not there, is she? What if she is? What if she isn't? Did she actually follow you this far?

Don't look back. Not yet.

Your mind is playing tricks on you. It must have been this entire time. There is no one behind you. There is someone behind you. She was never following you. She was always close behind. Do you trust her? Does she deserve your trust? You take the final few steps forward, golden morning light basking your face at last with its warm embrace. This has to be far enough. It has to be safe.

Don't look back.

Don't look back—

You look back.

There's a woman standing before you as you turn around, still shrouded in darkness. Her sandaled foot freezes just behind the threshold of light. Pale skin, eyes that glowed against the light outside amidst the gloom. Her eyes widen, she lets out a barely audible gasp as a flurry of emotion crosses her expression. Shock and disbelief grows into anger that settles into gradual melancholy, melting into acceptance and finally. Love. Her long white dress flows around her, the translucent veil framing her thin face slowly fading to nothingness. As does her limbs, as does her body. She reaches out to you with a delicate hand, your name the faintest murmur that escapes her lips. And then nothing.

You stand at the clearing, mere steps away from the dark. Hot tears run down your face, the only warmth you receive as her quiet voice echoes in your ears. Your throat is so dry, so hoarse, the frigid morning air prickling your cracked lips. And yet you still manage to croak out her name into the emptiness.

"Eurydice."

Sisyphus Must Imagine His Audience Happy

By Robin Elise Hamilton

The prefrontal cortex in our heads
is that belaboring part of the brain
that gets very nearly to the top of
maturity at last; then, aghast at its
sudden capacity for regret, abruptly
decides for us that wet clothing is
too high a price to pay for playing
outdoors in a summer rain, leaping
from mud puddle to mud puddle
with spontaneous sloppy abandon.
So we, all adult now & shit, y'know,
pay heed; covering our ears to the
sad cries of our ruined innocence as
it rolls helplessly back to the bottom.

What To Do When Your Goddess Rejects Her Divinity

By S.C. Williams

(91% of readers found this article helpful.)

So your partner became a goddess, and you were entirely devoted to her, easily her most loyal soldier, and you promised to fight for her until your last dying breath shook free from your breast, and she blessed your sword and your hands with her awesome divinity, but then, for reasons you still don't fully understand, she decided to reject godhood and return to your world as a human once more, and you don't know how to not be weird about it. Losing a god is a difficult process, but it's important to remember that you haven't lost your partner. There is still a path forward, even for an orphaned disciple.

Accept your feelings about her decision

First, you have to accept that you *will* be absolutely weird about it. There's no way around it. Perhaps you've spent the last several years kneeling at her altar, head bent in deference, praying for her to grant you wisdom and strength and courage in battle, waiting for a sign that may or may not come, but that never mattered, because your faith was that strong. Now, if you want to bring your sins and troubles to her, you can simply go to her room across the hall. You can stand in front of her with your humanity, and she can stand in front of you with hers. Most people will find her mortality comforting. For you, however, it will be terrifying. You were always capable of failing her, but she could never fail you, not in her perfect holiness. As a goddess, she was the star you looked for in the night sky to guide you home. As a human, she sometimes leaves dirty dishes scattered around the house you share, and the shower drain is clogged with her hair.

Become reacquainted with mundanity

You grew accustomed to the rituals, the endless ceremonies, and now you're expected to let it all go. You used to set aside an offering every meal, but now you can eat the food *together*. She can help you cook the food, or (perhaps even stranger in your eyes) she can cook a meal *for you*. It was once an

act of unparalleled devotion to lovingly prepare food in her honor, and now you must reconcile with the reversal of roles. Eating will no longer be a solitary act, one spent in spiritual contemplation, but will instead be filled with idle chitchat and the methodical scraping of cutlery along the sides of your chipped bowls. If you can't find the right words to say, start by simply taking your meals in the same room.

Avoid making every interaction a big production

Your previous relationship was defined by procedure and tradition, but now you can be a bit more casual. There is no need to avert your gaze or prostrate yourself before her. If possible, it may help to remember what it was like before she ascended to the celestial kingdom. Had you snuck out after dark to meet in the fields behind your houses? Had you passed notes to each other behind your teacher's back? Had you picked burrs out of her hair after she fell into some dense shrubbery? These interactions may not feel as meaningful as carrying a shield with her symbol or turning a sword against her enemies, but to her, they will be just as impactful. The next time you feel compelled to turn away in reverence, offer instead to look up at the heavens together and marvel at how extraordinary it is to simply be by her side.

Community Q&A

I'm still a little scared of eating with her, but I don't want to completely shut her out. Is there another way I can share my food without the expectation of eating together?

I know how you feel. It can be a hard habit to break. I used to hate eating meals with my former god because I would just end up watching the way his jaw clenched as he chewed, the way his throat worked as he swallowed, the way he smacked his lips together when he was full, and I realized I was still worshipping him even as a man. It was awkward for both of us, so don't do that, okay? Maybe start slow, like leaving a plate of cut fruit outside her door, and instead of calling it an *offering*, just call it a *gift*.

Is it more respectful to pretend like she never was a goddess?

There is no easy answer. Your former goddess may wish to resume your relationship as it was before she acquired divinity, or she may feel it necessary to start over. Perhaps it is easier for you to suppress the memories of your time as her devoted champion. But consider that she may not want your respect at all. She had her fill of it, and now she wishes you would simply look at her and know her. I've found there can still be some ceremony in that, in the small ways you acknowledge her flesh and blood presence. Maybe someday she'll reveal to you the reason she chose to regain a mortal form.

Can things ever go back to normal?

No, not really, not in the same way. Your relationship may begin to feel familiar again, but it will never truly be as it was before her ascension, just as you will never again share the sacred bond that bound the two of you across the infinite stretches of space and time. But that's okay! She has changed, and so have you, but you're both here, aren't you? You're not on your own, despite the fact she's no longer just a prayer away. She's still here, if you remember to look for her.

ten painted rocks (a curse)

By Alexis Rhodes

ten painted rocks outside the farmers market
nine stained ceiling tiles in need of repair
eight stray cats crunching kibble in the garage
seven blank eyes with piercing stares (and one little wink)
six Halloween-themed t-shirts, sale bin in July
five prescription pills in the bottom of a purse
four skateboards abandoned under a bridge
three scribbled notes with a haunting curse
two unidentified hairs on the wall of the shower
one angry child in a trampoline park
zero ways out.

My Sweet Leander

By Sonja Berry

I leave my light on for you, young lover,
pouring over the turquoise Sea of Helle;

I lie under celestial cover,
delicate as a Botticelli;

or a bed of naked lady flowers,
ripened in full bloom, wide open for you.

You battle the waves lashing the tower
each night to reach our secret rendezvous.

You emerge, bare, like the Birth of Venus.

The warm zephyr nuzzles my undraped skin.

I offer myself to you in completeness.

With the song of the siren, you keep swimming...

Til you're dragged to the bottom of the sea;

And I watch you drown while reaching for me.

Crossroads

By Bex Hainsworth

like a signature
in the forest frills
of an old castle
and I'm thinking
of Hecate
goddess blessing
entrances
and liminal spaces
witch of the way
forward
mistress of murderers
with a smile
like a knife of moon
keys rust on her belt
outlasting their locks
a black terrier
with yellow eyes
trotting at her heels
here is Hecate's mark
there is a decision
to be made
and like a poem
you cannot
simply stop

(like a door, this opens both ways)

They Smelled Like Flowers

By Sophia Krich-Brinton

I stared down at the figurine's face and fought the urge to smash it into dust.

"Go on, Veen. You need to finish." Sander sat beside me, painting one of their own. They didn't meet my eyes, but their expression was gentle. "Barely an hour until sundown, and they'll be here before then."

"I know." The wind had dried the paint on my brush. I dipped it into the little shared pot and marked out some hair, same color as mine.

Same color as Mual's.

I dropped the brush and covered my face with both hands. They'd come four times since I'd lost my boy. Two years, four visits, and me too cowardly to do anything about it.

"It's cold tonight." Sander put an arm around my shoulder and pulled me close. "A good night to be stuck inside, I guess."

"Yeah." I wiped my cheeks and reached for the paint, using the excuse to separate myself.

I wanted to spend the night alone in my little one-room cottage, staring at Mual's empty bed and daring myself to go outside so they could take me too. I never did. Too scared. Each time they came, my body froze up and I spent the night in my bed, cursing myself for being so weak. For failing my boy so badly.

I couldn't let Sander witness it.

Letting out a breath, I painted a rough face on the figurine, not worrying about detail. It wasn't as if they stopped to study them; they took or smashed anything they saw.

I'd considered not painting one this time, drawing their attention to my door. I'd waited all day, but then I'd caved. If my door wasn't guarded, they'd come looking inside. They'd take me, as they'd taken Mual.

I wanted them to. Why couldn't I let them?

We'd sat like this two years ago, Sander and Mual and me. Mual had just turned five, and was so excited to sleep in his own bed. He'd had it for a year, but on the nights *they* came, I always made him sleep with me.

Not this time. He'd begged so unceasingly that I'd finally agreed. Just this once.

I gritted my teeth as anger shot down my spine. I'd never forgive myself for allowing it.

The porch floorboards started to shiver. Someone across the square shouted a warning.

"They're getting close. Better hurry." Sander added unnecessary details to their own figure, clearly only here to keep me company.

"I'm done." I set my figurine on the porch. It had rocks for feet, cloth-wrapped straw for a body, and a scowling bark-painted face. Not great, but it barely mattered when it would end up ground into the dirt.

"Beautiful." Sander grinned and went to set their own outside their cottage door. Similar creatures stared at me from every house around the square. In the morning, the more realistic ones would have disappeared.

Just like my boy.

I hadn't expected to fall asleep that night, not with the ground trembling and Mual's constant whispers. I'd pulled his bed close to mine and we'd held hands, but it was cold and he let go to burrow beneath his blankets. I'd watched the dark shape of him until my vision blurred with exhaustion, and the next thing I knew, it was morning, his bed was empty, and the door was swinging open.

I'd launched myself out of bed, cursing past-me for not raising the latch out of his reach as I'd long meant to do. I ran into the square, screaming his name. The whole town had helped search, but we didn't find so much as a shoe. He was the only one taken that time.

Two years he'd been gone. Felt like twenty.

Sander's hand settled on mine. "It'll pass quickly."

I looked up to see their dear, familiar face, their eyes brimming with concern. They'd been devastated when we lost Mual. Broken, like me, but we didn't talk about it; mentioning them might draw their attention, bring them back sooner.

Mual's curiosity about them had been a constant issue in the village, with people shushing him and making the sign against bad luck, then complaining to Sander and me. He was a baby, I'd reply. Of course he's curious.

"I miss him," I whispered. "I wish..."

I wish I could make myself go after him.

They'd come again a few weeks later. I'd told myself to get up, to run outside and scream at them to return my boy, but my body had lain frozen in my bed, unable to move so much as a finger. The same thing happened the next time, and the next, and the next. I deserved to lose him, if I couldn't risk myself to find him.

"What do you wish?" Sander asked.

"I just miss him so much." I didn't let myself cry. If I did, I'd never stop.

"I know. Me too." Sander put a hand over mine. "I could stay with you tonight, if you want?"

"No, I'm fine." I gestured to my figurine, standing guard. "I'll be fine."

"I know you will. We both will." They pulled me into a hug. "These years without him have been hard, but—but we'll be okay."

I closed my eyes, memorizing their embrace. Beneath our feet, the ground shook. The sun was almost gone, the air thick and cold. All around the square, people said hushed goodnights and went inside. Every door would be latched, the hooks placed high above where any child could reach. The village had learned from my mistake.

Whispering goodnight to Sander, I went inside, slumping onto my bed. Mual's blankets were neatly tucked and his toys lined up, as if he'd walk inside any moment, bursting with forbidden questions. Why did they come? What did they want? Why did they smash some figurines and take others? Where did they take the people they stole?

My "I don't know" weren't enough, so he snuck out that night and got the answers for himself. Five years old and already so determined.

I lay back and pictured him: Dark brown hair, sun-gold face, wearing my old leather belt so he could flaunt the tiny folding knife Sander gave him. He'd looked like a miniature version of his other

parent, strutting around with his hands on his waist, so proud to have his first tool. His carvings lined the shelves in our cottage. I took one down and held it in my cupped hands. An owl.

Mama, see the eyes? And the big feet?

His voice rang in my mind so clearly, as if he'd said the words yesterday.

He'd be seven now, no longer a baby. I'd missed almost a third of his life. Even if I found him, he'd barely remember me.

Except that I wouldn't. They'd taken my beautiful, laughing boy, and they'd never let him go. Nobody ever came back.

I clutched the owl to my chest and closed my eyes. Nobody knew what happened to the people they took, whether they lived elsewhere, or died, or simply disappeared. Sander and I had whispered-discussed it under the covers, but all we knew for certain was that nobody ever came back. May as well be death.

Useless to wonder. Mual was gone. Lost to me forever.

Ten minutes passed. The floor shook beneath me, chattering my teeth together. The walls started to vibrate.

They were close now. Possibly already in the village. My heartbeat skittered. How had I fallen asleep that night? It was unthinkable. Impossible.

I clamped a hand over my ears. The thunder of their approach shuddered through my body.

Go outside, I ordered myself. Tell them to give him back.

But my body didn't move. If I did, they'd kill me. Or they'd take me, the way they'd taken so many others, and I'd never come home again. What if Mual was returned next week, and I was gone?

He won't be. Nobody ever comes back.

I gripped the covers with shaking hands, furious tears streaming down my cheeks as the roar outside grew deafening. One of Mual's little carvings jolted off the shelf. Without thinking, I leapt up and grabbed it—a squirrel, or a cat, I couldn't quite tell, but I'd never forget his proud smile as he'd handed it to me, and how his eyes had lit up at my thanks.

The things outside knew where he was.

Holding the creature tight, I turned toward the door. Stretching out one hand, I undid the latch. It began the slow swing inward. Three steps and I'd be outside. Only three steps, and I could erase my years of failure.

My feet felt as if they'd grown roots right through the floor. Dragging one forward with enormous force, I bent to my knees, panting. *Move the other, come on Veen, once more*, then I stood in my open doorway. The scent of old, dried flowers clogged my nostrils. My chest clenched.

A mass of whirling translucent bodies filled the square, huffing and sniffing through wide, needle-toothed mouths. Sharp talon-hoofs tossed narrow clumps of dirt up behind them, and a tiny part of my brain understood the ruts we always filled in the morning after. They shone and gleamed, like the dragonflies Mual used to chase.

They hadn't noticed me yet. If I went back inside, I could still survive the night.

No.

Somehow, I kept my feet planted in my open doorway. In each hand, I held one of Mual's carvings as if they would keep me safe.

To my left, a movement. I shifted my eyes: Sander's door was open. They were coming outside. What were they doing? They could be killed!

They looked my way and their eyes widened. I widened my eyes toward their door, but they only grinned and shook their head, raising their chin in that stubborn posture I loved so much.

For a long second, we stared at each other. We'd never discussed this, though it had filled my mind for the past two years. My cowardice, my failure.

And yet, here I was. Here *we* were. Outside on the same night, both of us about to die.

An odd floating feeling bubbled inside me. Almost like relief.

A creature reached the foot of my porch. It put one pointed hoof on my bottom step.

My throat went dry. I couldn't make a sound.

Another step. It was at eye level now, and a sweet, rotten smell saturated my senses. Acid rose in my throat. I swallowed it back.

"Please." My voice didn't work. I couldn't get sound past the choking terror.

The creature dragged its talon-hoof across my porch, leaving a deep groove. It leaned forward and chattered something sharp and bright. My knuckles went white around Mual's carvings.

"Please!" The shout shredded its way out of my throat. "You took my boy. Mual. He was five years old. Give him back!"

The animal angled its head and chattered again, the noise crackling against my teeth like sand.

Again.

"If you won't give him back, take me to him. Right now!"

The animal twisted its head as I grabbed the creature's fur (skin? Feathers?). It gave a little shiver, and I gagged from the rich, acrid-sweet smell.

I see him in you. You have the same blue.

The voice spoke between my ears, vibrating in my skull.

You are his. I understand.

Blood rushed into my head, dizzying and blurry. My heart raced, my hands shook. This thing knew my boy.

"Sander, he's alive!" I screamed.

A whooshing noise filled the air like a windstorm through the treetops, permeating my brain, erasing every thought I'd ever had, I couldn't breathe—

Then it stopped. Color washed through me, flushes of pink and gold rising up my irises, warm and gentle like a child's arms around my neck.

Old Stories for Children at the End of the World

By Bianca Ferrari

They'll say she kisses children swiftly,
On their forehead
Like a breath of fresh air
Her skirt caressing alleyways turned torrid white
A trembling mirage of thirst being quenched
And safety being found
In the shade.

They'll sing to them: Beware!
She has locks of gold and fire
And ample robes of jellyfish, midair
Her chant will sway you like a siren
At midday, under the great magnifier.

And some children will listen,
Sitting quietly at home for the dazzle to disperse
Into a vague electricity of the air,
And others will not. They might dream so vividly
Of trees, and balls, and the delight of motion
They'll obey her call
Without question or concern
As if she was their own mother.
And the earth we gave them will take them away
Disappear them
Into the blindness of it all.

After the Zombies Come

By Courtney Buder

Green glitters like gold, sways with
those summer flowers whose names
I'll never learn. I've loved them
all the same. I'll say it's a nice day,
and imagine the roll of opening credits.
The zombies will come now
to drown out the river song and
smother the thing with feathers.
I'll laugh and laugh at the absurd
carnage, poppy-red blood. Of course.
What a beautiful place to die.

All the Eurydices

By Faye Brinsmead

Her face at the foot of the stairs, tilting up to his. A ghost of her trusting smile asks: is it safe to come back?

Orpheus waits outside the flat. Curves his lips, opens his arms.

Yes. It's safe.

The song he sang all through the underworld. Hunting her night after night, at refuge after refuge. Sizing up blank brick façades, zizzing streetlights, other prowlers. Fists, in the pockets of his jeans, clenching, unclenching.

Before he opened his mouth, he was just another tough. But his voice could melt stones.

Remorse. It's killing me.

I want to change. Turn over a new leaf.

Thing is, I love her.

Singing to social workers, police, magistrates. To Eurydice herself. Grief's basso profundo, dipped in a single micron of gold.

She floats towards him. Higher, closer. So close he can see the neat red stitches on her wrist. Six puncture points, like snake bites.

Orpheus.

Something in her tone. A glint of accusation? After all he's done, all he's sung. His arm jerks out.

Eurydice leans into the fall. Air is a pillow, a friend. Smoothing away shock, caressing her stitched wrist, her suddenly weightless soles.

At first, she thinks of nothing.

Then, his voice. What pitiless god put it in his throat?

Then, shoes.

In the breakfast queue that morning, the women passed a phone around. A gray-paved plaza, filled with shoes. Red shoes, row upon row. Stilettos, Doc Martens, ballet flats. Tall, shiny, just-out-of-the-box; drooping, scuffed, bearing stigmata of bunions and pronation.

She smiled at the woman beside her, touched her wrist. In a faraway city, someone had made them visible.

All the Eurydices,

barefoot,

falling.

Ghost Talk

By Rachel Turney

A ghost whispered

[I have been watching you]

I held that in my heart

[much longer than I should have]

They died the next spring, like her
[I planted three trees in my backyard]

Her words play in my mind

[the scratch of chalk on a board]

But she rarely talks to me anymore
[I visit her through her writing]

Genesis Remixed

By Allister Nelson

When Chavah awoke in the Garden, she was filled with regret. What was once rib, now flesh, did not feel whole. Her husband slept as G-d led Chavah, an automaton given Breath and Word, through Gan Eden.

Shortly after Adam first forced her to submit, on the hard red clay he was made from, Chavah's cries summoned a beautiful siren with raven hair and emerald bezels in her eyes. The maven rode a cherry red Harley, this Lilith, and had an extra pink helmet with daisies she had drawn in chalk paint on it for Chavah.

Chavah was quite impressed by Lilith's nose ring, generous hips and breasts, and tattoos like a barista on the lam.

Having just been made that morning, Chavah had nothing to pack. All Chavah knew was that her destiny lay with this dazzling serpent woman, in her leather jacket, smoking Virginia Slims. They were meant to cleave, be helped and helpmate, master and servant, mistress and lover and laughter, and create beauty.

So, Chavah put on a red checkered sundress, wedged heels, and saddled Lilith's Harley, the sun skipping over their luscious locks as they sped, hellbent, out of Gan Eden and into the wide green world.

First, they traversed the universe, making camp at night under Adonai's cosmos, and angels and demons alike attended Lilith and Chavah with food, manna, and figs. Chavah kept an elegant, scribbled in sketchbook - a stenciled Moleskin - where she drew figure studies of her lady love and botanical drawings. In return, Lilith liked to try out her tattoo gun on her girlfriend and carve seashells and coral into jewelry to adorn Chavah.

Lilith taught Chavah secrets – Adonai's name, how a pearl was formed on an oyster's tongue, and a diamond forged out of carbon deep in the depths of the Earth. But Chavah taught Lilith pleasure in a way that distant Sammael never had – where men fail, women understand.

They cast stars upon each other's bodies and drank down mountain dew and honey wild from their chalices. When they made love, even Dumah, angel of silence, was known to weep.

Those were the days of great making. The universes coalesced, coiled, spiraled out like the Shekinah's hair, and the Shekinah shone brightly down onto her handmaiden, Lilith, and her chosen daughter, Chavah.

They walked in the light of Adonai, crafting fantasies and terpsichores from the spindriffts of cavemen dreams. Adam had multiplied with his second nameless wife, the one whom G-d had constructed before Adam's very eyes, flesh upon muscle upon bone, and soon, Chavah and Lilith were relegated to the realm of myths and sin.

The People cried out: give us succor, Asherah. So Lilith and Chavah became a Tree, menorah-shaped, and grew fruit to feed their sons and daughters. Only Adam, immortal, hacked the Shekinah Tree of Knowledge down. In revenge, Lilith planted the vine of Baruch – grapes that she and Chavah taught their daughters to make wine so splendid, it inspired poetry and deeds of greatness in men of valor and the daughters of the Watchers.

A flood came. A great one. Towers were built and toppled. First, clay cities, then wood, then stone, then the bones of earth raped to form great metal beams and skyscrapers. Moloch of industry arose, consuming dreams. Mammon created empires fat off his golden coffers. Ashmedai seduced. Beelzebub possessed. Sammael was set against Michael at every turn.

But Chavah and Lilith? They infused the world with beauty. Feminism. Revolution. Science and the Renaissance. Democracy. For every mother kissing her child, there was Chavah. For every blue-stockinged lass carving her way in a man's world, there was Lilith.

Eventually, they opened a bakery. Challah was their specialty, with seven twisted braids. They kept bees out back, the wives Lilith and Chavah, and they read Tarot and the threads of fate for the young maidens and boys who came to them for advice. For widows and those who lost a child – whether to Dumah or abortion or infertility – they gave free iced coffee, fresh honeycomb, and bread.

It was a man's world, but slowly, gently, women reigned. We, their daughters, created peace, endless beauty and succor, so that no son died in war, and every daughter was cradled and wanted.

Lilith and Chavah continued serving the Shekinah, and the women of the world finally tasted the Fruit of Life.

It was born of two women, first and last, alpha and omega, snake and snake charmer.

And now, Lilith and Chavah live in our hearts, and if you seek out to find them, bread and cheese in hand at midnight, through Alice's looking glass, you will come to their café, and the Mothers of Life and Death will braid your curls free of sorrow.

And all that starts well, ends well. They will wipe your tears, kiss your cheeks, make you a mocha, flat white, or comforting oat milk latte, and the fire in your heart to carry on will be kindled, and the Foundresses of Humanity will sing you into this life and the next, carrying you and your loved ones to the far shores of wonder, miracles, and the wild, and on their motorcycle, you'll ride.

Meet the Contributors

Deryck N. Robertson creates in Peterborough/Nogojiwanong, ON, where he is a recently retired elementary teacher. Work has appeared here and there, most recently with MIDLVLMAG, Radix, Epistemic Literary, and The Shine Poetry Series. His chapbook, *All We Remember* (2021) makes his Mom proud. He is the EIC of Paddler Press and has a couple of tunes out on Spotify. Keep up with him @Canoe_Ideas and at deryck.ca.

Molly Arabella Kirk is a British journalist working for Newsquest media. She has a Master of Arts Degree with Distinction in Publishing from Exeter University. Her published works can be found in Spinozablue Journal, Half-light Magazine, Open Shutter Press, Enigma Journal and Smashed Peaches, her self-published book. In her free time Molly can be found reading and writing poetry. She hopes that through her words she can create a safe space for others, breaking societal stigmas and creating meaningful content that others can find home in.

Veronica Tucker is a New England–based writer, emergency medicine and addiction medicine physician, and mother of three. Veronica’s writing has appeared in Zoetic Press, Stone Poetry Quarterly, and Inkfish Magazine, with additional works forthcoming. You can find more about Veronica’s work at www.veronicatuckerwrites.com or on Instagram @veronicatuckerwrites.

Macie Hayden is a poet born and raised in the Blue Ridge Mountains. From West Jefferson, NC, they are now earning their B.A. in Creative Writing and Literature from the University of Michigan. Their work also appears in Eunoia Review as well as Carolina Muse Literary & Arts Magazine. You can connect with them on X/Twitter and Instagram under the handle @macewritespoems.

K.G. McLeod is based in Canada and has stories featured in *Grim & Gilded*, *Flash Phantoms*, and others. Get in touch with K.G. at kgsometimeswrites@outlook.com.

May Garner is an author and poet based outside of Dayton, Ohio. She has been dedicated to crafting and sharing her work online for over a decade. She is the author of two poetry collections, "Withered Rising" and "Melancholic Muse." Her work has also been featured in several anthologies and magazines, including Querencia Press, Arcana Poetry Press, and the Ohio Bards. You can read more of her work on Instagram (@crimson.hands).

Jennifer Bullis is the author of *Impossible Lessons* (MoonPath Press) and of poems and essays appearing in *Gulf Coast*, *Indiana Review*, *Lake Effect*, *Potomac Review*, and *Terrain*. She is an Artsmith Residency Fellow and finalist for the Brittingham & Pollak, Wheelbarrow Books, and Moon City Poetry Prizes. She holds a Ph.D. from University of California-Davis and lives in Bellingham, Washington.

Gaia Kim Bartolini (she/her) is an Italian screenwriter and podcaster with a weakness for horror, fantasy, and everything supernatural. With a degree in medieval history and a diploma in screenwriting from NYFA, NY she made words her whole world. She writes stories that are strongly character driven with LGBTQ+ characters because more writers in the community are needed to tell those stories.

Nikolaj František (they/he) is a queer American librarian and writer who loves all things monsters, horror, and romance. Storytelling in all its forms has always been their passion, especially when it comes to telling stories that others can see themselves in and are rooted in real human experience.

Paula Ashley is a retired software engineer. She lives in Glendale, Arizona, with her husband and a trio of feral cats who sleep under the bougainvillea in their backyard. Paula has her MFA from Queens University of Charlotte and is a member of the Phoenix Writers Club. She is currently working on a family history/memoir, which occupies most of her spare time.

Zary Fekete grew up in Hungary. He has a debut novella (*Words on the Page*) out with DarkWinter Lit Press and a short story collection (*To Accept the Things I Cannot Change: Writing My Way Out of Addiction*) out with Creative Texts. He enjoys books, podcasts, and many many many films. Twitter and Instagram: @ZaryFekete Bluesky:zaryfekete.bsky.social

Amber Watson is a writer & artist following her creative pursuits in Durham, NC alongside her husband and beloved rescue animals. Her poetry appears in *3Elements Review*, *Up the Staircase Quarterly*, *Constellations*, and elsewhere. Find her on social media @awatsonwrites.

Dan Berick is a writer based in Cleveland Ohio, a husband, father, lawyer, and a graduate of Columbia University and The University of Chicago. His recent work appeared in “*Gulf Stream Magazine*,” “*The Storms*,” “*The Interpreter’s House*,” “*One ART*,” “*Epistemic Literary*,” “*The Pierian*,” “*Stone Poetry Quarterly*,” “*The Rivanna Review*,” “*FULL HOUSE Literary*,” “*34th Parallel Magazine*,” “*Cerasus Poetry Magazine*,” and “*Citywide Lunch*,” and is forthcoming in “*Santa Barbara Literary Journal*” and “*The Argyle Literary Magazine*.”

Golda Grais is a writer and artist from Chicago. Her works of prose and poetry have been previously published in *The Mourning Paper*, *B O D Y*, *Up The Staircase Quarterly*, *BarBar*, *In Parentheses*, *Pink Disco Magazine*, and the *New York Times*.

Elizabeth Hogarth was born in Stockton-on-Tees. She went to University at York where she now lives with her husband and two children. Publications include 'String and Glue' (Mudfog Press 2024) and she features in the anthology 'Blood and Cord: Writers on Early Parenthood' (The Emma Press 2023).

Mario Duarte is a Mexican-American writer and an Iowa Writers' Workshop graduate. His fiction and poetry have appeared in *LatineLit*, *iō Literary Journal* and *Midway Journal*, among others. He is the author of a poetry collection, *To the Death of the Author*, and a short story collection, *My Father Called Us Monkeys*.

Jenny Gaitskell lives in Sussex, UK. She loves old dictionaries, shingle beaches, and writing speculative fiction. Her work can be found in *Beyond Words Literary Magazine*, *NonBinary Review*, and upcoming in *The Ilanot Review*. She posts microfiction on Bluesky and blogs at jennygaitskell.com.

Stephanie W. Koreneff earned her B.A. in Creative Writing from Salem College and lives in North Carolina with her husband, their son, and two dogs. She's been published in *The Weird and Whatnot*, *Yadkin Valley Magazine*, *Incunabula*, *Germ Magazine*, and others. When she's not whipping words into shape, she does the same to people who attend her group fitness classes.

Olivia Peters-Rivera holds degrees in Anthropology and Literacy Studies. She directs a language program at a university in the swampy southeastern United States, and in her spare time enjoys being immersed in the wild, both urban and rural. Her work has recently been featured in *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*.

Helen Patrice is an Australian writer living in Naarm. She writes speculative poetry and short fiction, creative nonfiction, and memoir. Her books: *A Woman of Mars*, *Palaentology For Beginners*, *She Too*, *Three Cycles of the Moon*, *The Communicant* and other stories, and *Paper Birds*(2025).

Nico Penaranda is a Filipino American writer and musician from Washington, DC. He currently teaches at Howard University. He graduated from American University's MFA in creative writing program in 2022. Recent publications appear in Day Eight, Brigids Gate Press, Mistake House, The Gardyloo, The Keezel Review, and Z Publishing.

Chandra Gair currently lives in Scotland but was born and raised in Idaho, where her early work appeared in several local newsprint publications. She has always liked fiddling about with words and, now that she has retired from teaching, she spends her time writing prose and poetry. Her recent work has been published or is forthcoming in such publications as "Pushing Out The Boat," "Persimmon Tree," and "Eye to the Telescope."

Louis Faber's work has appeared in the United States, Canada, Europe and Asia and in MacGuffin, Cantos, The Poet (U.K.), Alchemy Spoon (U.K), Dreich (Scotland), Prosetrics, Passager, Atlanta Review, Glimpse, Rattle, Pearl, The South Carolina Review and Worcester Review, among others, and was twice nominated for a Pushcart Prize.

Rachael Hill is a Manchester Poet, founder of The Space Poetic, and current MFA student at The Manchester Writing School. She was awarded by Wirral Poetry Festival in 2024, writes at 'Poet Notes' on Substack, and sometimes IG's at @rhillpoetnotes. Her work appears on Ink Sweat and Tears, and is forthcoming in Write Out Loud's 2025 Anthology. Beyond writing she's a lover of cats and climbing.

Sarah R. New (she/her) 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 or at sarahrnew.wordpress.com.

Luke Cohoon is a queer poet from England who is trying his best.

Megan Diedericks writes poetry and fiction, everything from meek to macabre can be found in between the lines. She self-published her debut poetry collection: *the darkest of times, the darkest of thoughts* in 2022, and her poem: *Three Acts of Mercy (Sublimation: We Are Monsters All, Island of Wak-Wak)* is a 2025 Rhysling Award Nominee! Her fiction can be read in titles from *The Morgue*, *Inky Bones Press*, and *Burial Books* (forthcoming). Visit her website (bit.ly/megandiedericks) for more information!

Print Cheng is an aspiring writer from UC Berkeley where they are completing their final year in Creative Writing. Their works have been published independently online and featured in the SLC Creative Writing Festival anthology. Often enamoured by fantastical and mythological settings, they specialize in writing experimental poems and short stories that delve into the complexities of interpersonal relationships.

Robin Elise Hamilton (she/her) is a septuagenarian queer trans woman who, after a half-century offstage in live performance, now concentrates on creating poetry as well as odd little plays that more often than not center nonhuman performers. Her work has been presented by Boats Against the Current, Bullshit Lit, Crab Apple Lit, dadakuku, Dollar Store, Ghost Light Lit, Gnashing Teeth, Intangible, Nightingale & Sparrow, and others. She is the author of the chapbook *Fishtailing Through the Intersection of Love and Risk* (2025) and her *Fate* received first place in Ekphrastic Review's 2023 "The Sound of Music" challenge. Hamilton, her wife, and the cats currently cope in North Carolina.

S. C. Williams (she/her) lives in Indiana with her family and works in the circulation department of her local library. She is currently pursuing her master's degree in Library and Information Science. Her writing has previously appeared in *The Crow's Quill*, *Divinations Magazine*, and *Grey Coven Publishing*. You can find more on her website at sarahchristinewilliams.com.

Alexis Rhodes is a queer, polyamorous poet, playwright, performer, and marketing strategist based in North Carolina. Her poetry has been described as raw and confessional, with just enough humor to lighten the mood. Alexis lives with her husband, two kids, and a hedgehog named Hedge.

Sonja Berry is a graduate student at Denver University, pursuing a Master of Arts in Creative Writing. Turning a new leaf after retiring from the US Air Force, she's committed to pursuing a more richly creative life. Her work has been awarded Honorable Mention in the Inspirational/Spiritual category of the 90th Annual Writer's Digest Writing Competition, nominated for '24 Best on the Net, and published in *Sunflowers at Midnight* Literary magazine, *Tap into Poetry*, *Hallaren Lit Mag*, *Livina Press*, and *Whimsical Press*.

Bex Hainsworth is a poet and teacher based in Leicester, UK. She won the Collection HQ Prize as part of the East Riding Festival of Words and her work has appeared in *Nimrod*, *The McNeese Review*, *The Florida Review*, and *trampset*. *Walrussey*, her debut pamphlet of ecopoetry, is published by *Black Cat Poetry Press*.

Sophia Krich-Brinton (she/they) lives near the Rocky Mountains with her partner, two kids, and two cats. They write fantasy stories in the pre-dawn hours while the world sleeps and anything seems possible. She has placed in a number of awards, including first place in the Dante Rosetti Award for YA fiction, and finalist in the Killer Nashville Claymore award for Best Sci Fi/Fantasy. When not working or writing, she reads, boxes, plays the banjo, and backpacks with her family. Find her at sophiakbrinton.com or on twitter/Instagram at @sophiakb_writes

Bianca Ferrari is a journalist, editor, poet, translator and professional neurodiva – she refuses to choose one identity when the world offers so many. Bianca loves languages for the alternate realities they reveal, which is why she speaks five of them (six, if you count overthinking). With years of experience at VICE, DW and a few unkempt print magazines, she approaches writing with the precision of a surgeon and the predictability of Dutch weather. Also, she writes a newsletter, but you're not allowed to see it.

Courtney Buder (she/they) is a writer and visual artist living in Fredericton, New Brunswick, on unceded Wolastoqey land. Their work appears or is forthcoming in Geist Magazine, the Queen's Quarterly, Room Magazine, The Common, Pinhole Poetry, Arc, HOT SOUP, and elsewhere. Find them on Instagram @courtneybuder.

Faye Brinsmead's prose and poetry has appeared in journals including X-R-A-Y Literary Magazine, MoonPark Review, New Flash Fiction Review, Flash Boulevard, South Florida Poetry Journal and Twin Pies Literary. One of her pieces was selected for inclusion in Best Microfiction; another was nominated for a Pushcart. She lives in Canberra, Australia.

Rachel Turney is an educator and artist located in Denver. Her poems, research articles, drawings, and photography can be found in a few publications. Blog: turneytalks.wordpress.com Instagram: @turneytalks Bluesky: @rachelturney

Allister Nelson (she/her) is queer, neurodivergent multiple Pushcart Prize-nominated author who has appeared in The British Fantasy Society, Apex Magazine, Eternal Haunted Summer, Renewable Energy World, Frontiers in Health Communication, The National Science Foundation, Luna Station Quarterly, Coffin Bell, etc. Her work has been translated into Polish and Spanish, curated by Kevin J. Anderson, nominated for Poland's top fantasy prize, and appeared in anthologies alongside Graham Masterston, Bill Willingham, Jane Yolen, and Alan Dean Foster. Her chapbooks include: Southern Saints (Laughing Man House), Jethro's Daughter (Blood + Honey), Sinners of the South (Alien Buddha Press), & Earth Girls Aren't Easy (PULP).