

DIVINATIONS

MAGAZINE

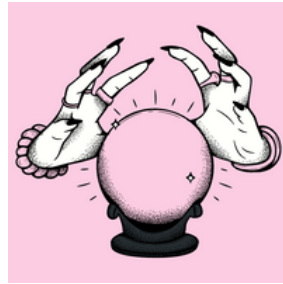
CURSED

OCTOBER 2023

FEATURING

ASCOUGH, HANNAH · BANERJEE, SHAMIK · BIBBY,
LAURA · DAVIDSON, A.L. · DIAZ, YASMINE · HUFKIE, M.L. ·
LUMPKIN, DORI · MAGEE, GRACE · PALLAS, JAY · RELPH,
JP · RONCERO-MENENDEZ, SARA · WELLS-BROWN,
BOBBY · WEISS, ALEXANDRA · WHITE, SHERI ·
WINKELMAN, LIVVY LINZ · ZELKOVA, BRIANA





DIVINATIONS MAGAZINE

Divinations Magazine ©
October 2023

Unless otherwise stated, all rights to written or visual pieces belong to their respective creators. No work in this issue may be reproduced without the permission of the creator(s). Divinations Magazine is not responsible for any plagiarism committed by its contributors.

Editor-in-Chief

Amy Douglas

Content Warning

This issue contains work of a potentially triggering nature. Individual works contain content warnings as necessary.

To find out more about Divinations Magazine, visit
www.divinationsmagazine.co.uk.

CURSED

Contents

Acknowledgements • i

Editor's Letter • iii

Cursed • 1

Laura Bibby

Propagation • 3

Hannah Ascough

Canaries • 11

Alexandra Weiss

Winter-Bourne • 17

JP Relph

Wrong Turn • 21

Yasmine Diaz

Call me Pygmalion/Medusa is my deadname • 27

Briana Zelkova

A Fresh Start • 29

Jay Pallas

Scream Queen Confessional • 37

Sara Roncero-Menendez

Born In Death • 43

Bobby Wells-Brown

A Wake • 49

Grace Magee

Demonology • 57

Livvy Winkelman

The Bust of Roth Hoffmann • 63

Shamik Banerjee

Binding • 65

Dori Lumpkin

LoveFixer • 68

Sheri White

Scold's Bridle • 75

M.L. Hufkie

The Plight of Professor Pyle • 83

A.L. Davidson

About Our Authors • 90

Acknowledgements

Editorial Assistants

Abiodun Salako

Alex Atkinson

Alexis Crafts

Amanda "Pand" Milo

Ayu Sekarlangit Mokoginta

Cara Blanco

D.W. Baker

Elizabeth Hasan

Gina Gidaro

Grace Elizabeth Magee

Io Carpiso

Jade Kiiskinen

Juliette Guido

Keira DiGaetano

Mia Autumn Roe

Oliviah Lawrence

Quinton Li

Shranup Tandukar

Sydney Wright

Marketing Assistant

Emily Campbell

Editor's Letter

Dear Reader,

Greetings from the shadowy depths of Divinations Magazine! We are thrilled to present our second issue: “**Cursed.**”

Curses are a concept that transcends borders and time periods, resonating across cultures and throughout history. It has woven itself into folklore, literature, and mythology worldwide, making it a theme with an inherent and timeless appeal.

This theme encourages our authors to unleash their creativity and imagination, exploring supernatural elements, magical realms, and the boundaries between the natural and the mystical. From ancient curses to contemporary hexes, familial legacies to metaphorical afflictions, “**Cursed**” offers a canvas for a diverse range of interpretations. Within these pages, you’ll find a collection of carefully curated stories and poetry pieces that delve into the haunting world of curses. These talented authors have masterfully crafted tales that will leave you captivated.


Before we immerse ourselves in this bewitched journey, I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to our dedicated editorial and marketing assistants. Their tireless efforts behind the scenes have ensured that every detail is impeccably attended to.

So, dear reader. Turn the pages, but watch out for the shadows—they might just be hiding something sinister.

Stay Spooky,

Amy M. Douglas



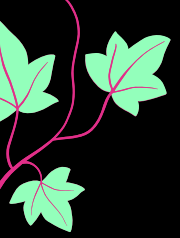


Cursed
Laura Bibby

I take no comfort in the dark
nor in the heart of a fire that never diminishes
shadows undulate blue like a candle
lit by an unknown hand

I close my eyes against the moon
waning among granite clouds
a sickle moon
sicker still than one with something to purge

I drink the tea laid out for me; lavender to
calm
and honey to soften a hardening heart
the bitter taste of that witch knows
I cannot be pacified.



Propagation

Hannah Ascough

Jon is pulling on his socks and pushing ivy away from his face when he first thinks his tattoo has grown larger. He reaches down to touch three leaves he's sure weren't there before, but the black lines which twist down his calf and slide around his ankle seem placid now. He shakes his head - tries to move the ache growing there.

The tattoo had been his idea. He'd been sitting at the table, watching videos of couples kissing, wrists inscribed with each other's names, when he'd said to Sheila, "We should get matching tattoos."

Sheila had snorted from the sink where she was washing dishes. "Why?"

Jon had shrugged. "I don't know — they're cool. Shows everyone we're together."

For a moment, Sheila had looked almost sad. Then she'd turned away again. "Maybe," she'd said. "But I'm not sure yet."

At the time, Jon had been disappointed. He'd thought himself romantic, and he'd felt taunted when he walked into a fretful philodendron on his way out of the kitchen.

Now, Jon shows his tattoo off to his friends. It's just stopped shedding skin, but in the dim yellowed lights, he squints because he thinks for a moment that the lines are moving, thrashing in some unseen wind. He shrugs it off.

"Stick and poke," he says proudly. "Sheila did it herself. And they match."

His friends are impressed; they call him romantic and he agrees. They ask if she's the one and he says yes. "She's the greatest girl I've ever met," he says.

They nod. She's the greatest girl they've met as well, though they've only met her once.

Jon had thought Sheila pretty when he first saw her profile, and he'd said as much. Then he'd asked her out. She'd taken five days to reply, but Jon, in that time, had looked so much at the picture of her lips caught on a white lily and at the photo of her tattoos pressed up against the slender legs of pink oleander that he'd decided she was perfect. He'd asked her out twice more until she'd said yes.

When he'd first visited her, he'd been curious about all her plants — the black lines of stems and leaves curling around her ribs, the sweating, fretting pots hanging above her bed, the vines circling her neck and tangling down the walls.

"They're living memories," she'd said. "All the places and people I've met."

Jon had laughed, reaching out to touch a worried pothos next to the bed.

"You've led a big life, then."

Sheila had smiled. "Well, you can propagate them."

Jon hadn't known what that meant.

"It's when you cut part of the stem of one plant and let it grow new roots to make another plant," Sheila had explained.

"Seems violent."

"It's not," Sheila had said, and she'd stopped smiling.

"It's new life. And only when you have to."



She'd not spoken to him the rest of the night.

Now, Jon is putting dishes in the sink when he notices two more leaves on his tattoo. He trips in surprise and knocks over a large, arrowhead plant. He swallows hard, his throat burning, staring at the new leaves that snake past his ankle to pierce the veins in his foot.

Sheila swears at the dirt on the floor when she gets home. Jon wants to tell her, but she's holding a dustpan and asking why he hadn't cleaned it up himself, and besides, Jon's worried she'll think he's losing his mind.

"Do you want help?" he asks, watching her sweep. He can't tell if she's angry, though her shoulders seem rigid before she exhales and points at the laundry on the floor.

"Throw that in," she says shortly, "and then come dry the dishes."

Jon grins and salutes her. "What are we having for dinner?" he asks, batting at two anxious ivy plants swinging in his way. Sheila ignores him.

It had taken Jon a while to convince Sheila that they should move in together — longer than it had taken him to talk her into the tattoo — but she'd eventually agreed, and though he'd gotten used to living with the twitchy stares of the plants that filled her apartment, he hadn't gotten used to living with Sheila.

"I wish I saw you more," he'd said once, looking at the spinach she'd handed him to chop. Her back was to him, hunched over the stove, the long stems of her tattoos studding with sweat. "We never just sit and relax, you know?"

Sheila had turned around then, and for a moment in the yellowed kitchen light, she'd looked exhausted, almost vulnerable, like she was about to cry, before she'd closed her mouth. "I really need that chopped," she'd said finally.

And Jon had sighed and left the kitchen because Sheila, he'd learned, was always closing down, waving wildly between moods he couldn't understand, and the shifting made him dizzy. He'd told his friends she was the best girl he'd met, called her perfect, a dream girl, but privately he thought of her as overgrown. When he stared at the whispering vines climbing her walls, he wondered if he'd ever find anything underneath.

Jon is in the shower, letting water pool at his feet, and when he feels certain his tattoo has grown more leaves. He can see at least two more unfurling by his toes, and another one wrapping around the edge of his heel.

His throat swells with panic. He tries to lift his foot, but finds he can't. He bends and pries and his nails cut into the black lines of the tattoo and blood pools by the drain. When he finally pulls his foot up, he splashes backwards with the force, and chokes up water.

He hears Sheila slam the front door. Jon wants to call out to her, but he's not sure what to say. He doesn't want to worry her.

She's frowning and dusting the shelves in the bedroom. Jon's throat is still thick, and his head hurts, so he sits on the bed and watches. The petals and leaves twist around her shoulders in dark lines like his own tattoo, and he wonders suddenly if they've ever grown as well.


He opens his mouth to ask, but Sheila turns and says, "I'm going away for the weekend."

Jon nods.

"Don't forget to water the ivy," she adds.

"No," Jon says, "of course not." She smiles at him, and he can see all her teeth. His skin aches.

Their worst fight had been about the ivy. Sheila had gone away for a



week, and when she'd come home, Jon had been on the couch, flipping through his phone.

"How was the trip?" he'd called out, watching her pick her way through the shoes strewn across the hall.

Sheila had not said anything. She'd reached up instead to touch the shrivelled brown leaves flaking from a hanging pot.

"I thought I asked you to water this," she'd said quietly.

Jon had sat up then and grimaced. "I'm so sorry," he'd said. "I forgot."

"How?" she'd asked. Her eyes were damp and fogged.

"What?" he'd said, leaning forward.

Sheila had fisted the dead leaves, dusting the carpet with their bones. "What, were you distracted by all the laundry and the dishes you didn't clean?"

Jon had stared at her, not sure what to say. She'd started pacing then, pulling more dead stalks from hanging pots, letting them trail a path behind her. "Every time I think it'll be different," she'd said, almost to herself. "And they're never different."

"What?" Jon had asked again.

"Be fucking useful," she'd cursed suddenly.

Jon had stood up. "Look, I'm really sorry," he'd said again. His heart had been pounding; he'd felt bad but bemused, thought privately that she was overreacting, but worried, too, that she would breakup with him. "It's just that you have so many plants."

"And yet, here I am — keeping them and me and you alive," Sheila had hissed. She'd left the room, and Jon had slept on the couch that night. She'd shaken him awake the next morning, and her eyes were no longer wet.

"I'm sorry," she'd said, not blinking. "I want to do the matching tattoos."

Jon had sat up quickly. He'd shed the weight of the fight with the blankets, and he'd hugged her. That was how — after weeks of persistently wearing her down — Jon had found himself seated across from Sheila, getting his tattoo.

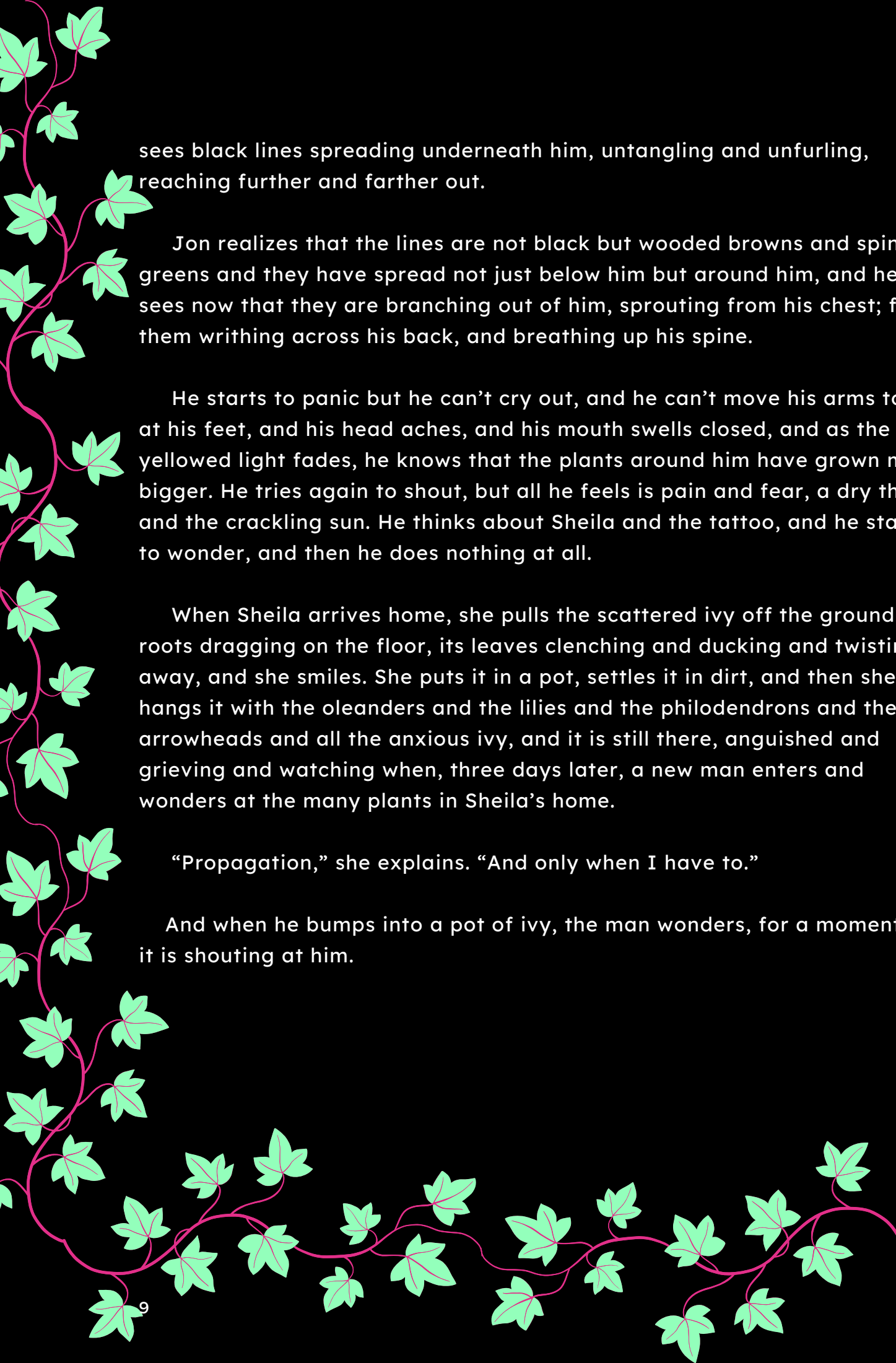
She'd done it at night, leaving only one yellowing lamp on, her arms cradling a wooden bowl that Jon had never seen before, filled with needles and ink and plastic and soap. She'd surrounded him with ivy and when he'd asked why, she'd said it was for reference. Then she'd dipped the needle into the black ink and throughout the evening, she'd slowly laced a creeping vine down and around his calf, knotting it with heart-shaped leaves. It had burned, but Jon had embraced it, watching her whisper to herself as she wiped away the excess ink.

"This is perfect," he'd breathed afterwards. "You're perfect," he'd added.

She'd smiled, and said, "You're going to love it," and she'd left to put her bowl away. Jon had not thought the comment odd until three days later, when he'd peeled back the plastic and wondered if the tattoo had grown bigger.

When Sheila leaves that weekend, Jon thinks about water. His throat is swollen and dry and he withers in patches of hot sunlight, and every time he looks down with his head spinning and his stomach roiling, the black vines of his tattoo have snarled together even more. He falls asleep, his foot burning, surrounded by anxious plants.

When he wakes up, his feet are too heavy. He tries to move, and is startled by pain and the noise of a distant ripping. He tries to turn his head, but his neck is too stiff, and so he glances instead at the floor. There he



sees black lines spreading underneath him, untangling and unfurling, reaching further and farther out.

Jon realizes that the lines are not black but wooded browns and spindled greens and they have spread not just below him but around him, and he sees now that they are branching out of him, sprouting from his chest; feels them writhing across his back, and breathing up his spine.

He starts to panic but he can't cry out, and he can't move his arms to pull at his feet, and his head aches, and his mouth swells closed, and as the yellowed light fades, he knows that the plants around him have grown much bigger. He tries again to shout, but all he feels is pain and fear, a dry thirst and the crackling sun. He thinks about Sheila and the tattoo, and he starts to wonder, and then he does nothing at all.

When Sheila arrives home, she pulls the scattered ivy off the ground, its roots dragging on the floor, its leaves clenching and ducking and twisting away, and she smiles. She puts it in a pot, settles it in dirt, and then she hangs it with the oleanders and the lilies and the philodendrons and the arrowheads and all the anxious ivy, and it is still there, anguished and grieving and watching when, three days later, a new man enters and wonders at the many plants in Sheila's home.

"Propagation," she explains. "And only when I have to."

And when he bumps into a pot of ivy, the man wonders, for a moment, if it is shouting at him.

Canaries

Alexandra Weiss

It started with the philodendron after the accident. If you can call a car crash caused by an asthma attack an accident. A gift from the office, something to get her out of bed that would probably withstand neglect. She had too much dead matter already. Dirt choked her dreams. Tendrils snaking from the black soil like so many worms.

There had been others before. Cut flowers in the hospital. Their color bled out, lost among the wristbands and compression stockings. But she didn't notice them, fresh, wilting, rotten. Time went by faster under fluorescents. She'd pull out her phone, almost forgetting, open the chat, and stare emptily into the last few texts.

Babe guess what

it's cool if ur busy, i'll tell u at dinner

jsyk i'm in the back by the fireplace

where are u?

baby?

All from her. All unread.

She didn't want to send any more. Typing to the image of him on the other end of this disconnected number sometimes almost helped, but sending anything new would erase this last piece of who she was before she

knew. So she typed everything out, stared at the words for a while, and then deleted them. And read, over and over, those last few messages, pretending she was still eating free bread, looking at the menu, figuring he was held up at work.

At the funeral things were different. White roses and lilies everywhere. Red pollen standing out against her dress, sticking to the wet mascara on her knuckles. In the mountains of flowers, she thought she saw his ghost, rising from the dark leaves. Shuddering, red-eyed, she let Aunt Megan lead her to the buffet and pour her a coffee with too much sugar. She didn't refuse; she could use the sweetness. Through the haze of forks on wine glasses and tearful toast speeches, she stared back at the flowers, searching, fruitless.

When the philodendron showed up she barely registered the card attached. Saw only green, dark, and variegated. Smelled the roses again, his peppery cologne, saw almost-forgotten-already eyes rising to meet her.

Unsure what to do, she draped it across the bookshelf, sat, staring. Waiting. But like any mirage, he didn't stick around. Only the green growing thing, alive in its glazed pot, continued, roots pressing down into cold earth. She hated it for living. But she kept returning to the spot on the bookshelf where its leaves came to rest, gravitating from the empty pixels of another timeless sitcom to search, hopelessly for a ghost among verdant stems and graveyard dirt. The palm-sized hearts, flat faces, stared back like wedding photographs in the portfolios still saved to her desktop alongside other things they'd been trying on, things she couldn't bear throwing away just yet. The world was a weighted blanket. The cursor hovered. The fan stirred the leaves again, not-quite-cooling the room. She drifted back over, still seeing flashes of the funeral. Cascading rivulets of wax, memorial candles. Brief bursts of too-sweet coffee and cloying, ghostly flowers. Always just out of view.

"Beep. Beep. Beep." The microwave sang into the darkness. Her eyes refocused at the sound. Yesterday's coffee was re-ready.

knew. So she typed everything out, stared at the words for a while, and then deleted them. And read, over and over, those last few messages, pretending she was still eating free bread, looking at the menu, figuring he was held up at work.

At the funeral things were different. White roses and lilies everywhere. Red pollen standing out against her dress, sticking to the wet mascara on her knuckles. In the mountains of flowers, she thought she saw his ghost, rising from the dark leaves. Shuddering, red-eyed, she let Aunt Megan lead her to the buffet and pour her a coffee with too much sugar. She didn't refuse; she could use the sweetness. Through the haze of forks on wine glasses and tearful toast speeches, she stared back at the flowers, searching, fruitless.

When the philodendron showed up she barely registered the card attached. Saw only green, dark, and variegated. Smelled the roses again, his peppery cologne, saw almost-forgotten-already eyes rising to meet her.

Unsure what to do, she draped it across the bookshelf, sat, staring. Waiting. But like any mirage, he didn't stick around. Only the green growing thing, alive in its glazed pot, continued, roots pressing down into cold earth. She hated it for living. But she kept returning to the spot on the bookshelf where its leaves came to rest, gravitating from the empty pixels of another timeless sitcom to search, hopelessly for a ghost among verdant stems and graveyard dirt. The palm-sized hearts, flat faces, stared back like wedding photographs in the portfolios still saved to her desktop alongside other things they'd been trying on, things she couldn't bear throwing away just yet. The world was a weighted blanket. The cursor hovered. The fan stirred the leaves again, not-quite-cooling the room. She drifted back over, still seeing flashes of the funeral. Cascading rivulets of wax, memorial candles. Brief bursts of too-sweet coffee and cloying, ghostly flowers. Always just out of view.

"Beep. Beep. Beep." The microwave sang into the darkness. Her eyes refocused at the sound. Yesterday's coffee was re-ready.

The morning she noticed a new leaf had split from the wing-brown cicada casing of its old bud, it was a bone out of the corset. The crushing sensation that had been bearing down since that night receded. In the latest heat wave it had been suffocating. It still loomed from the shadows in the corner of the room, followed her to take a piss, to get a bottle of wine from the fridge, but a half step farther behind. And that half step of space was all the breathing room she'd had since the call came.

Her ribs almost ached from the freedom. The new leaf fluttered slightly in the artificial breeze. She needed more. Needed to liven up the place, to stretch the rubber band farther. Needed something to care for, something to carry on. She ordered cuttings off the internet. Succulents and cacti first; she'd never had much luck with plants and wanted to start with hardy stock. Boxes appeared on her doorstep day after day as she started plugging the holes with aloe, agave, kalanchoe.

Weeks stretched into months, as the summer expanded around her, dragging on past previous cold snaps. She started introducing a broader array of herbs and houseplants, growing in complexity of care and volume until even the sunlight falling through the windows of the downtown apartment they used to share took on a green tint. Basil blotting out a once-sunny windowsill, spider plants hanging heavy above the sofa, succulent rosettes choking the table where she chewed mechanically on frozen pizzas, alone in her private garden.

Faint ring of the buzzer. Amy from work with casseroles and other gestures.

"Hi!" A cautious, friendly wave, a restrained hug.

"Just wanted to check in, see how you're hanging in there..." Here the polite smile faded briefly.

"Wow, look what you've done with the place!"

"Ha ha, yeah, it feels good to have something to care for."

"Good for you, being so healthy..."

"Thanks, Amy."

She found silence worse than conversation. Amy wanted to help, but didn't know what to say. Nobody knew what to say, how could they? She took a sip of wine and tried to restart the small talk.

"How are things for you and Eddie? How's the office?"

"We're good, things are good. Finally finished re-doing the storm blinds, so that's nice... Everyone's looking forward to when you come back! But, of course, only when you're ready..." Perched awkwardly between indoor trees, their shadows looming, she smiled encouragingly, but things got quiet again. A humid wind off the balcony rustled darkened leaves and hair, breaking the film of silence and stillness. Amy left before the second glass of wine.

Sweat pooling on the seat, she sat there with two wine glasses, washed-out colors flashing over her numb face and immobile body. Sleeping alone in their bed still felt impossible, so she'd wait for the TV to drain enough away for her eyes to force closed of their own accord and pass out on the couch.

Snapping off a segment of pencil cactus in surprise at a phone ring cutting through silence and sleep, she cried on the floor like a little kid over a dead pet. The accident playing out again and again in unintelligible pieces of memory, sudden bronchospasms, a seat belt unbuckled just for a second, just to reach the inhaler...

But, watching white latex seep from the wound, she felt something she'd almost forgotten existed. Desire. Gnawing at her insides like worms.

From outside, tendrils of summer haze wormed their way through the apartment. The leaves whispered, churning in warm air to a lullaby of distant traffic. The shadow watched her from the kitchen as she opened the door, picked up the box, legs shaking. It loomed over her, swelling as she slit the cardboard, constricting her fingers as they pulled the urn free.

Crushed, she stared into the powder that was him. At the waxy leaves of the philodendron. Into the warm brown dirt. Knees buckling from the opposite of falling in love, she returned his dust to dust. When the plant, breathing in conversation with her, traded exhalation for exhalation, she could almost taste him. Almost. But it wasn't enough.

The machines beep again. She can see them from the corner of the ceiling, huddling around the bed. The colored bracelets snapped in place, leads stemming from the body, not quite here, not quite dead, just continuing. Until the root breaks, plug sliding from socket.

Ashes to ashes, smoke to smoke. Plants left in the alley. Seedpods, cactus paddles, accidental cuttings spread in the wind, take root, invade. Spreading grief over the neighborhood like mustard after fires, poisoning native ecologies. Filling the lacunae of death. The haze over the city, close as atoms can be, continues accreting, undoing. Through an open window, a fire alarm chirps.

Winter-Bourne

JP Relph

A truculent wind rattles our house on Threadneedle Street. Stomps the garden, haunts the chimney like a demented, premature Noel Baba. Still, the big living-room window lures us from the fireside.

Beyond the wind-battered pane, the night garden stages a skeletal opera: leafless trees and shrubs waving skinny arms and seed-filled heads to Nature's aria. Burnished leaves dance across the shaggy lawn. I press my hands against the chilly glass, my eyes adjusting to the interplay of shadows. Gillray- a lean orange tabby with enigmatic eyes - leans against my leg: humbug tail enwrapping my calf, chest reverberating. He enjoys these nightly observations as much as I do.

Our moon-rimmed visitor doesn't so much emerge as **resolve** from wet black shadows- darkness itself stretching and tearing to form her. She strides through the tormented garden to the window, places a gloved hand on the glass. We feel her shuddering desire through the strange connection. Gillray's fur static-crackles, his purr thunders.

Her washed grey eyes seem ancient, pulsing with sadness on a winter-white-smudge face. Platinum hair escapes her inky crepe hood to tattoo her cheeks. Her smile is the curve of the suturing needle, sharp with purpose. Something darkening. Something she is perhaps doomed to seek. A vengeful need that crazes the glass with frost. Gillray mewls. I breathe out white shivers. We don't fear the Old Lady. She's not here for us.

She's here for **him**. He is already damned.

I used to have a Mama. One who sewed flowers and birds onto beautiful quilts, baked decadent cakes and pies, nurtured herbs and roses. One with cheeky hazel eyes and an unashamedly loving smile. The antithesis to my father: a bank manager represented by a series of depressed-grey suits and



empty eyes. He envied Mama's warmth and light, drained it at times and then left her in the soot of shadow.

Mama disappeared on a night hushed by snow, somehow leaving without disturbing a flake. Without Grandma's gold watch and Granda's medals. Without us. Gone while I was sleeping under extra blankets with a furry neck-warmer, both girl and cat dreaming of spring.

The next morning, I found an empty kitchen, the absence of gardenia-lily shampoo in the chill air. Father at the dining-room table - his face like congealed oatmeal, hands red-raw to the wrists - said she'd left us. Taken only her favourite handbag and plaid wool coat. He drank too much coffee and left his eggs to harden on the plate. I marched out into the snow, my slippers vanishing, the cold climbing and cloaking me until I was numb. Gillray stood in the doorway wailing. We knew she'd never choose to leave.

Father didn't mention her again. Climbed into his grey suits and concerned himself only with others' debts. Then it was spring, far from how we'd dreamed it, and the Old Lady came. Sensing my boiling grief- knowing it, honing it.

Tonight, there's an urgency to the Old Lady, and a terrible peace. I unlock the front door, turn and follow Gillray slowly up the stairs. Behind us, the door howls open and a breath colder than any wind moves my hair, caresses my neck. Bristles the fur on Gillray's tail. We reach the landing - bright squares of wallpaper where photos once hung, a vase of dried Goldenrod that rustle-shivers. I go left, cat at my ankle, and the Old Lady glides right. A swirling storm cloud of black crepe and menace glimpsed over my shoulder, pushing open Father's door, crashing inside.

In bed under extra blankets, Gillray and I drift to sleep as the windsong reaches a clamorous crescendo. The next morning, only ashy smears are tangled in Father's sour sheets - I tear them from the bed and cut them to ribbons for the fire.

—

Winter is close on the night before we leave to live with Mama's sister. We have one last nighttime visit while Aunt Julia sleeps unaware in the guest room above us, wrapped in one of Mama's quilts. The garden is calm in this final darkness, peaceful. Pressed to the big window, I frown when two figures approach. One familiar in her veils of shadow, grey eyes glittering. The second- a coalescence of fireflies and silvery moths- has cheeky hazel eyes. An unashamedly loving smile.

Mama presses her hands to the glass: one each for me and Gillray. He whines sorrowfully, orange paw raised. I smell hot pastry and thyme. A feather's waft of gardenia-lily. Mama whispers a few papery words to dry my tears, and I kiss the glass between us to feel the ghost of her warm cheek. I pick up Gillray, press him to my aching chest. The Old Lady takes Mama's arm and when they turn, the night enfolds them in a winter-borne embrace.



Wrong Turn

Yasmine Diaz

It wasn't a good idea to drive this fast in the fog but the two needed to get off from this unpleasant sideroad. The wind whips into their black hair; the top down on the convertible seemed like a good idea when the sun was out. Now it just seemed to add to the eeriness of the misty summer night. Somehow the fog was only blocking the path of the car, and not the illuminated moon.

"I think you took a wrong turn! We're not on the expressway anymore- we're gonna end up lost! It doesn't even feel like we're moving!" Solange yells over the wind.

This makes Mary-Ann crane her neck over to her sister. She darts her head back to face front and hears her sister take in a large breath. Her foot slams the break.

They both let out startled gasps as they jolt in the car, their breaths filling the fog. She thinks that her sister saw something, maybe a deer in the middle of the road. But with the fog all they can see are the worn down yellow tracks against the black pavement in front of them.

"What is it? What did you see?" Mary-Ann quickly shifts to park.

Solange leaves her questions unanswered as she opens her side door and puts both of her feet on the ground.

"Tell me you saw a white woman? Blonde hair? Dark eyes?" Solange looks to her sister.

"What? I think you just imagined it. Can you get back in the car please?" Mary-Ann pleads with her sister.

"Hello? Is anyone there?" A voice called out from the fog, bouncing off the open road.

The sisters look at each other in silence. It was a thing they did that pissed their parents off all the time. One look shared between them was a whole conversation.

"Hey! Are you okay? Where are you?" Solange shouts into the fog.

Mary-Ann's eyes widen. "Solange get back in this car right now."

"We have to see if that lady is okay, what if she's hurt? What if she needs help?"

"I don't know who you thought you saw but I don't see anything. Get in now!"

"If something happens to that woman and we did nothing- " she begins.

"Dude, what woman? I literally didn't see anything but the fog. You probably just need to get some rest." Mary-Ann cuts her off as she presses her foot on the gas pedal. "Just try to relax while I get us home and out of the damn boondocks."

"This has nothing to do with that. I know what I saw and I saw a woman in one of those emergency jacket things."

Solange faces front and sees the jacket again through the fog. She shoots her pointer finger at the front window. Mary-Ann slowly brings the car to a halt. Sure enough, the blonde woman is standing there. She's mere inches away from touching the car. Her gaze pierces through the windshield. A few seconds pass between the three women, before Mary-Ann honks her horn. Solange yelps and jumps; the woman doesn't move an inch.

"Why would you honk at her? She's not an animal in the middle of the road."

Solange says while getting out of the car again. She ignores her sister's loud protests and slowly walks over to the woman.

“You took the wrong turn.” The woman’s voice is somehow amplified by the fog.

“What did you say?” Solange takes a tiny step back at the same moment that Mary-Ann tells her to get back in the car.

The woman tilts her head in confusion. As if she wasn’t the one in the middle of a road. As if she wasn’t almost hit by their car a few moments ago. Mary-Ann hits the horn again.

She hits it over and over until Solange spares her a look of annoyance. “Do you not understand how weird this is?” Says Mary Ann, “Let’s go! Now! In the car, Solange, I swear to god!”

Solange crosses her arms over her chest and turns back to the woman.

“We’re trying to get home from here, we live in the city. Where do you live?”

“It’s my job to help people like you,” says the woman.

Solange backs up a bit more at the statement.

“Are you fucking around with us?” Mary-Ann opens her door and slams it shut, stomping over to the woman. “Is this some sick joke or-or prank? You think it’s funny to dick around with people?”

The woman’s lifeless eyes look at her. “I wish you no pain. Only to make this easier for her.”

“Make what easier? And who the hell are you? Why the hell are you here alone?” Mary-Ann asks.

“I don’t think we can leave, Ann.” Solange’s voice cracks which makes Mary-Ann take a closer look at her.

Solange is staring past the woman. Something in the far distance is catching

her eye.

“Solange, what are you talking about? What do you see now?”

“I can’t explain it...” She trails off with a small smile on her face.

The woman reaches out her hand for her, and Solange hesitantly lifts her own arm up. Before Solange can take it, Mary-Ann swats her hand away. “Are you crazy?” She whispers at her sister. She turns her attention back to the woman. “Stop this right now or I’ll run you over with my car!”

“Mary-Ann don’t scream at her,” Solange says, “She’s not here for you.”

“What - ” Mary-Ann begins to mutter but then her sister places a kiss on her cheek.

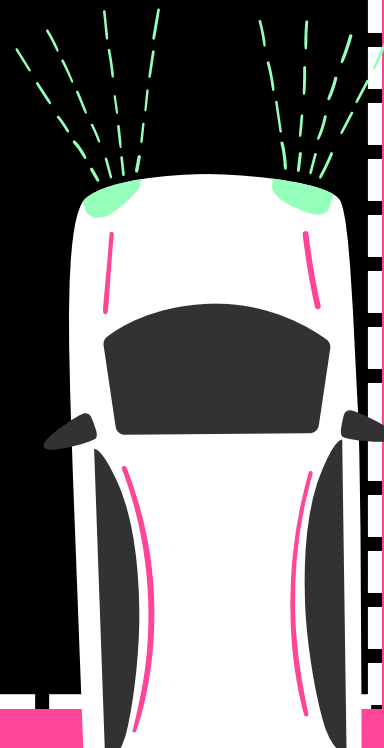
It stills Mary-Ann. Long enough that when Solange and the woman begin to walk away, it takes her a second to realize that she should go after her. She wants to move. To yell. To scream out for her sister. To tackle her sister to the ground so she won’t go anywhere. But by some force of nature she can’t. All she can do is watch as her sister walks hand in hand with a woman into the dark night.

The fog was suffocating her. Her eyes blinked to clear the tears and her throat felt like it was being squeezed, not letting her get any air. She was losing the air in her lungs.

Solange.

“Ma’am I need you to stay awake. Can you hear me?” a forceful voice cuts through to her.

Mary-Ann blinks and everything is upside down. Her hair is hanging from her head, blocking her view. There’s a dull pain in her waist and she knows it’s from her seat belt. She lets out an involuntary groan before reaching up to the buckle holding her upside down. On her body, there’s a pair of hands.



They catch her as she falls.

“I got you ma’am don’t move, I’ll help you - Ken get the gurney! I need to get her out of this vehicle now!” The voice shouts again, sending Mary-Ann’s head through a series of ringing.

Slowly, the stranger pulls her body out. She lays her on the wet cold pavement alongside her car which births smoke into the fog and fire into the night. Her head rolls to the side. Her eyes are tired but she can see what’s ahead.

A girl. Her hair and the pavement blended in with each other. Clothed in what her sister was wearing tonight. Right down to the tennis shoes she had for three years, and the overalls with embroidered flowers she did herself. She’s surrounded by shards of glass. Next to her lies a fresh book.

“Solange, oh god,” she mumbles to herself.

A voice makes her look away from the still body laid out on the pavement. It’s the woman. The woman who she thought she hit, who seduced Solange out of the car, and got her to take her hand. Wearing the same neon yellow jacket too. A Paramedic.

She wonders if the woman remembers her. The woman sighs and looks away from Mary-Ann. In the same direction that her sister lay.

“How did my sister end up like that?” Mary-Ann asks the woman. “Why is she - why am I okay and she’s not?”

“I’m sorry, but I really need to look you over- ”

“She went with you. She took your hand even though she didn’t know you! You took her someplace else. What did you do to my sister?” Mary-Ann’s voice cracked.

The woman looked at her. Eye to eye. Her face dropped the Paramedic’s façade that it was playing. “I did my job.”

At her words Mary-Ann stops crying. The woman begins to turn her back on her. She shifts. Mary-Ann’s hand touches the concrete. Her face morphs into worry.

“You must’ve really hit your head - I need to get you checked out Mary-Ann.”

“No I-” she looks back at her sister’s body. Mary-Ann begins to crawl over to her sister. She ignores the woman calling out her name. The pavement is rough but the surrounding glass around her sister is harder. It digs into her palms but she winces through the pain.

She hovers above her sister’s body, taking her now shaky bloody hands and reaches out for her sister’s cheek. Solange’s lips are turned upward into a small smile, her eyes still open.

The woman’s hand lands on her shoulder, forcing Mary-Ann to look at her. Her shoulder burns.

“I am so sorry Mary-Ann but I really need to get you some help.”

Mary-Ann shakes her head. Stares at the woman. Eyes determined. “Bring her back. Bring her back. Take me instead, she’s worth so much more. So much more. Please.”

The woman pauses. Mary-Ann turns to her sister. She’s sleeping, she thinks. “I’ll take you,” the woman says reluctantly, “but the cursed might not like it.”

Mary-Ann nods, frantically. She looks at her sister one last time. The woman takes her to the ambulance.

Call me Pygmalion/Medusa is my deadname
Briana Zelkova

do you ever pay too close attention
to the laces snaking across the top of your foot,
fallen locks from Medusa,
the way you tie them in knots
giving away your secret hand preference

i watched you hold the snakes with ease
criss-crossing them into loops
the same way for each foot everytime
carefully pulling out the slack
to prevent an unraveling escape

i hope they stay in their perfect stiff bows
heel pressed into toe, no unlacing
until it's time to go outside once more
functional trophies
like deer heads mounted on walls
my charmer of snakes,
my aspiring gorgon-slayer,
all gray in the single light shining from above him
while my locks hissed and wept
to see their brethren on his feet



A Fresh Start

Jay Pallas

Ki's Curses and Malignant Maladies: Thirty-Day Notice to Vacate the Property

The crumpled-up eviction notice smashed into the edge of the wastepaper basket, almost knocking it over. Ki saw red, balling her hands into her acrylic nails digging into the soft flesh of her palms. She lit a third incense and breathed in deeply. Layers of frankincense, rosemary, Palo Santo, and traces of other aromas worked their way into her system. She looked out the window, the streetlight made the rain shimmer and the tarmac gleam.

Curses did not discriminate. Quick, just, fair. Transparency in transaction above all else. Ki had relished these truths throughout her curse-giving training, falling for the misplaced belief that they actually applied to her.

Things had derailed quickly. Right from the start she'd been pigeonholed into an inconsequential sector: Jilted young women seeking vengeance on ex-lovers, her work only cheapened as her clientele continued to bottleneck. Meanwhile her male peers whispered into the ears of political leaders seeking swift rises and business moguls out for glory. They got to see empires rise and fall, but Ki had been laughed out of enough board rooms to know she just 'wasn't what they were looking for'. Now her business was located next door to a newsagent and a local chippy - or rather, it soon wouldn't be.

She stared down at her reflection in the glass countertop. It was almost opaque in the dim candlelight, giving her a clear view of the many bangles adorning her wrists, her black lips, and choppy hair. Underneath her sweeping eyeliner her eyes were tired and dull, and her piercings on her ears and face no longer shined like they used to. Curses might not discriminate. They didn't have to. Because there were plenty of others who already did.

The bell chimed when a customer entered the store. A draught rushed through, disturbing the incense.

"Good god. How are you supposed to breathe in here," he muttered. Through the heady fog, Ki raised an eyebrow. He wasn't the kind of customer she was used to receiving. He looked as if he'd come straight from work. His grey suit was speckled with rain and his face was flushed from the cold.

He hadn't noticed her yet, his attention taken by the shelves of tomes and bottles. He navigated the narrow spaces, edging his way to the talismans and charms that were dashed across the centre table. He stopped at a box of wooden rings and grabbed one with a grumble. "This doesn't look so special."

"Read the sign."

He jumped, finally noticing her sitting behind the counter.

"What?"

"Sign." She pointed her long acrylic nail at the sticky note just above his head.

HANDLE AT YOUR OWN RISK. "Feel free to ignore my advice. But as the shop keeper, I am obliged to tell you. You don't want to play with that." He went on twisting the ring between his fingers as if he hadn't heard her.

"It's made from oak instilled with the magic of the Dryads. If you hold onto it for too long, you'll turn into wood."

He dropped the ring with a clatter.

"If you are interested in objects that can change a wearer's physical appearance, I also have the gorgon's eye talisman, which will turn anyone who looks upon it to stone, or the shepherd's cloak, which will transform the

wearer into a goat.”

The man’s nostrils flared in disgust. “No. I’m looking for a spell.”

“What are you after and who are you cursing?”

“Well, me.”

Ki’s brow furrowed. “You want to curse yourself?”

He made a disgruntled noise. “I know it sounds odd. But I wouldn’t be here if I wasn’t desperate.”

Ki bit back her reply and swallowed. With her impending homelessness hanging over her head, she couldn’t afford to be picky about customers.

“Okay. Why don’t you just tell me what kind of curse you’re after.”

“I want something to make me forget.”

“Forget what? A moment, a person, a phone number? Different curses are needed for different circumstances.”

“Blast—Everything! The last twelve years of my life. My work, my marriage, the kids, all of it.” The man went purple in the face.

“You’re looking to disappear?”

“If that’s what you’d like to call it, then yes. I need to disappear completely. I’ve made a few mistakes in my life. I’ll admit that.”

“What kind of mistakes?”

His eyes narrowed. “Are you supposed to ask this many questions?”

“I’m just trying to work out how to approach this. I’ll need a bit more

information to create the right curse for you.”

The man sat down on the step ladder in the corner, shelves of spells towering over him. He removed his wedding ring, soothing the worn metal with his thumb. “Things just haven’t gone as planned. I’ve hurt people, and now I don’t know how to fix it. I’d really like to just begin again. You know, a do-over. A fresh start. Don’t we all deserve one of those? It’d be great if I could get a new name too, and a new job. Maybe even a new town. I don’t care if they’re not fancy. I’ll pay you good money for it all. Can you manage that?”

Ki wet her lips and shook her head. “I’m sorry. I can’t help you.”

The man stood up. His hopeful look morphed before her eyes. “What do you mean you can’t help me? You’re supposed to sell curses, right? Well, I’m asking for a curse. Sell me a curse dammit!”

“You don’t understand what you’re asking fo—”

“Maybe if you spent less time on your makeup and more time on your job, you’d be better at this.”

She bit her lip.

“Prettier too. I don’t understand why women want to wear so much makeup these days.”

She hung her head, her career fragmented across the countertop in the candlelight. The store, the trinkets, the overflowing wastepaper basket. The opportunities snatched away from her, the degrading pats on the head. The incremental pushes and pulls that steered her limping course here.

A culmination of turbulent emotions tore through her. A thousand vengeful curses ready to inflict upon the world. She was fed up with vengeance. She couldn’t get enough of it. She was boiling in scorn and bubbling with contempt, sitting behind a counter in a dead-end corner of

town, watching the rain fall on the piss and vomit covered streets outside her window. Her practice was drowning in it all.

She came up for air. “I have just the thing for you. Give me your ring.” Her sharp acrylics clipped against his fingers as he placed his ring in her open palm. He gasped and drew back, seeing the small incision she made on his index finger.

“What do you think you’re doing?”

“Do you want this to work or not?”

She pricked her own finger and gathered their blood together. She dragged the edge of her nail over the ring, ensuring the silver band was well coated, then uttered the spell under her breath. Slowly, the blood sunk into the silver, the two elements combining to become one. “Here, put it back on.”

He grunted. “That didn’t look like much.”

“Sometimes the most potent curses are also the most unassuming. Trust me, it’ll work.”

He slipped the ring back on his finger. “Nothing’s happening.”

“Give it a minute.”

“I still remember everything. I should have known this was a dud. Just another cheap vendor selling hopes and dreams. You better not be charging for this—” His eyes became unfocused. Beads of sweat formed on his temples. His breath left his body as he fell to his knees, clutching his hand. The ring squeezed his finger until it turned blue. A deep purple sunk into his veins, shooting up his arm in pulses. His body jolted on the ground and contorted. He clutched his head as pulse after pulse swept through his system and enveloped his skull.

Ki opened her eyes. The patterns in the carpet beneath her swam, and the incense was clogging up her brain. She breathed in deeply. Her lungs filled with an aroma so strong she could taste the perfumed ash upon her tongue.

“So that’s what it smells like to you.” She said in a deep baritone.

Slowly, she rose to her feet and saw the man slumped upon the counter.

“What have you done to me?” He moaned between gasps.

“What you asked for.”

“No. This isn’t…”

“I cursed you. But what you asked for, that’s not what I do here. There are no curses that **help** you disappear. Curses don’t really help anyone. If they did, well, we wouldn’t exactly call them curses anymore.”

He wheezed, his smaller body taking longer to recover. Ki barely managed to get out of the way before he threw himself over the counter and wretched on the floor.

“‘A fresh start,’ you said. A pretty way of putting it. Nice and palatable. But it’s all the same. A quick out. A way to escape, to avoid life when it comes hurtling at you. That’s what you wanted. That’s what I gave you.” She grabbed some zip ties from behind the counter. She mostly used them as tags and for securing items so they wouldn’t get stolen, but they would work just as well for this. Locking the man’s wrists behind his back, she dragged him into the storeroom and grabbed her keys and scarf.

“No one gets a fresh start. No one’s life turns out how they wanted. Not really. Not for me. Especially not for you. It’s time to face the music.”

“Bitch!” He managed to fling in her direction, before she shoved her scarf in his mouth, black lipstick smearing across the material.

She glanced out the shop window. The rain pelted on her reflection, her grey suit and silk tie, the slight stubble on her chin, her receding hairline. “Thank you,” she said. “For reminding me exactly why I got into this job in the first place.” She turned the sign from **open** to **closed**. The bell chimed as she locked the door behind her.



Scream Queen Confessional

Sara Roncero-Menendez

No one is supposed to know they're in a scary story.

At least

Not until that final horrific moment
When knife cuts flesh,
When they see the face in the window,
When the doors won't open and walls start bleeding.

But I am cursed with knowing this script;

I have played the part for years.

Call me final girl,

Scream queen waiting for the credits to descend.

The film rolls on,

The music never relents,

The mounting crescendo deafening.

Sometimes, I can feel your hand in mine.

Sometimes, I can feel it

Around my throat,

Cutting off screams, cutting to black.
Funny that haunted and hunted
Are separated only by a single letter,
Held apart by a boundary as razor-thin

As the single stroke of a pen.
Haunting is just hunting
When the predator is not present,
Where the victim jumps at every shadow,
When every breath taken is a breath stolen.
Even though you are gone,
Long buried under the sod,
I can still remember
The times I called this carnage love.

In any good slasher flick,
The girl always makes it
To the second just before salvation.
Sirens in the distance,
A crowd mere feet away,
A friend, a lover, standing right there

And for a split second, the relief kicks in.
The soundtrack quiets.
And she feels safe.

But I have played this part for years,
So I do not flinch when I see the knife come into frame,
When she screams,
When everyone simply stands there and watches.

And yet,
What envy lives in the rotted carcass of my heart,
To wish I had even a moment
Where I thought I knew better
Than to be afraid.



Scream Queen Productions

Born In Death

Bobby Wells-Brown

The horizon was blotted grey and purple as a storm approached, and any light which penetrated the deep clouds was dull over an unsteady sea. He let the wind sway him slightly, his bare toes curled over the cliff edge like a fledgling bird gripping a branch. He thought it would be poetic, dying in the storm.

Rocking forward, he felt the thunder shake his ribcage and the lightning flash beyond his closed eyes. Soon the winds gave way to the rain, and it was time to fall. He opened his eyes slowly, watching the clouds grow and warp. He took a single deep breath and threw open his arms. His heels left the cliff and his chest led the descent. In the moment before he hit the ground, where he was as fast as the falling rain, the world stopped. The wind was still and the waves frozen, he was suspended above the rocks and raindrops hung as cold sapphires against the water.

A hand entwined with his, it was warm but thin, like bone covered in smoke. Turning his head he saw her face, both terrible and beautiful. Her eyes were wide and loving, but her skin was tight and dry over a gaunt skull. There was a comforting alienation in her figure, her body was a black shroud, no features discernible except skeletal hands and two large midnight wings. She floated beneath him, one hand clutched onto his and the other resting over his heart.

“Find who needs you and give them peace,” Death whispered, her breath leading him into darkness.

After a moment, where there was infinite silence and deafening noise, he found himself within the storm. Curled into a ball, his knees pressed into his chest and his head bowed down in painful prayer, he felt himself die. His bones broke and his skull shattered. He was destroyed and remade. His mind was consumed by pain, and he felt himself slip into unconsciousness.

Thunder growled beneath his ears and he started to wake. He was falling on his back, the storm was above him, the sky alive and angry. He stretched desperately to touch the clouds, but he was moving too fast. Frantically twisting through the wind, he looked out, seeing the cliff from which he had jumped. It looked small from the distance, the rocks like pebbles and the sea beckoning below him.

The icy water stabbed into his chest and the air froze in his lungs. In his first moments of stillness, he was met by pain. A sharp crack shot through the water, then a second. His shoulder-blades ripped through his skin, his exposed flesh burning in the saltwater. Two long white bones grew around him, feeling out through the abyss. His muffled screams fractured the water as he clawed at his scalp. Splashing in the waves he gasped for air; unable to control his body, he was pushed under the surface. The expanse was bleak and dark beneath him. The waves above were frothing like a rabid dog. As the pain scratched through his back he began to swim, tearing through the water his body became thin and indistinct. He could see his flesh change. Whiter. Skeletal. The pain subsided just as he reached the shore.

As the sand began to scrape along his feet, he dragged himself onto the rocks. He tried to stand, but weight on his back kept him pinned to the beach. Large waterlogged wings, shining like spilled oil, laid heavily across his frame.

He was Death.

The sky was beginning to clear and the dull grey clouds were rolling away and though the wind was still strong, the sun had a weak shine. His wings were dry now, though he didn't know how to use them, and so Death stood on the beach. There was a difference in the world. Colours so slightly brighter and shadows so slightly darker. Walking across the shore, he felt his feet sink deep into the sand, but when he looked back, there were no footprints.

Coming to a crevasse in the cliff-side, he could see a form ahead. It was slumped over on the rocks and surrounded by a puddle of crimson. Death inched closer, knowing what he would find. The body was broken, the limp flesh no longer supported by the bones which perforated the skin. Death bent down to see his face. Parts of his skull had caved in, but he ran a finger over the sharp, unshaven chin. Bringing his hand to his face, Death felt his own new chin, it was the same. Death considered how he could look so different and remain the same; his chin, furrowed brow and long nose were all still there, but now his skin was smooth, cold and dry. No muscle to form a true face.

The clouds shifted over the sun and a delicate shadow was cast over Death. He stood tall now, disregarding the body at his feet. That was no longer him. He walked on, watching the water recede.

Death came to a large stone groin at the end of the beach, steps would take him up to the top of the cliff. His legs were tired and weak, shaking at the prospect of the climb, his wings however, were powerful, just waiting to be used. Death flexed them, opening his new limbs fully and feeling the tips of his feathers brush the cliff beside him. Drawing his energy, he started into a clumsy run, tripping over seaweed and stones. He flapped and felt his body rise sharply, then drop onto the sand in shock. Dragging his body up, he tried again, running, flapping, rising; he flapped more forcefully and more frequently, pushing his body skywards. Death considered how light he had become, that flying was easy. He turned on his wing tips, joyful.

-

Death was flying far from where he had died. A metropolis sprawled out below him, the smell of petrichor heavy after the downpour. Death looked out, remembering his life there. The offices where he worked, roads he had driven down and people he had known. An instant after he had thought of them, they were gone. He was new and old and something different, something that did not need those memories. He remembered something else, his first instruction. "Find who needs you and give them peace," his own Death had told him so, informed him of his purpose while it was still hers.

The city was large and teeming. Death felt like a spider above his web, looking for the fly about to die.

Swooping low over the streets, he was unseen by the crowds who were far too busy to look, even if they could view him. Every so often he would pass a figure as indistinct as he was, their wing tips brushing in greeting. They could barely see one another and could not speak, they were so alone but together. Deaths in the world, waiting for a reprieve.

Death landed on a tall glass building, higher than the cliff that killed him and sentinel over the city. Honking cars were distant and street chatter quiet while he considered how to find whomever needed his help. The smell of carbon fumes permeated around him and the sky turned red in the evening sun as Death felt the pull. There was something, in the area where his heart used to be, that pulled him forward. It was painful to be so far away from the source of his yearning. Taking flight, he followed the pull, soaring over the skyscrapers and diving through the air to swoop beneath bridges. The closer death came to finding his charge, the easier the pressing in his chest became. Then Death saw him.

He was standing on the edge of a train platform, looking forward serenely. The evening light was casting long shadows over his face, but it was the shadows around him that let Death know. He was surrounded by an aura of darkness. Landing lightly on the platform beside him, Death considered the man. He was shorter than Death had been, his hair dark, but his shoulders were broad. Death looked over at the man, on his hand he had

written numbers '19:45', the board behind him read '19:38' he had only a few minutes.

Death walked around him, questioning his motives, trying to know his mind. He was struck by an image. A man stood on the edge of a cliff waiting for rain. A man with his chin, and nose, and brow, but a man who was no longer him. He could see, for the first time, the darkness around that man and how Death must have viewed him. How she could have waited with him. How she knew, and now he did too, that in moments before everything must be lost, that something must be found.

19:40. Death stepped in front of the man who was about to die, folding his wings around him in embrace. Death took one of his hands in his own, feeling the muscles in his fingers and the heat of blood, gripping tenderly. Death rested the other over his heart, aware that each fragile thump was numbered.

"Who are you?" Death asked.

"Michael," he whispered, "are you here to stop me?"

"No, I am your Death. I am here to see you die. I am here to help you die."



"What's your name?"

"I do not remember any more, and it is no longer important. I am not that man."

Death took his hand from Michael's chest and rested it on his face. They held each other's eyes for a moment. Michael calmed by Death and Death scared for Michael. A rhythmic engine was growing louder and closer. Michael took a single breath and looked down the tracks, two pinprick lights were coming closer.

"Thank you," Michael told Death.

"Find the one who needs you and give them peace," Death replied. Dropping his wings, Death let Michael run; he sprinted down the platform, jumping down onto the tracks. The train was coming closer and closer, Michael running to meet it. Death knew in a moment they would collide. A horn sounded frantically from the train, shouts for Michael to move, but he simply threw open his arms and waited. In the second before he was hit, the world stopped. The train paused inches from Michael's body. Leaves frozen in mid-air.

Death held out his hand and beckoned towards Michael. Something shining and transparent exploded from Michael's body, it was laid down on the tracks, stunned. Death walked forward and picked up Michael's soul, carrying him back to the platform.

"Be well," said Death.

Michael's soul started to stir, and so Death started to fade. In the final moments, Death saw the world restart. He heard the train screech in an attempt to stop but fail. He heard the screams from the platform as passengers witnessed. He saw Michael die.

A Wake

Grace Magee

The three rules to an Irish wake are;

1. All the mirrors must be covered; to stop the soul from being trapped in a reflection.
2. All the clocks must be stopped at the time of death, just like the heart.
3. The body must never be left all alone including at night. This is why it is called a wake.

The rules were hard to follow for Mairéad Murphy's death, because she had lived alone. As far as anyone knew, her only companion had been her shadow. And as she died in the dark, even that hadn't been there to keep her company.

Her neighbours had done the needful. When the ambulance finally took her body away, they hung the bedsheets over windows, mirrors, and picture frames. This gave the pensioner's house the appearance of a strange butcher shop, where blankets were stripped, ripped, and hanged. The pipes whined, ba-boom, ba-boom, until someone thought to switch them off. There was only one clock in the whole house to stop hanging in the Good Room. However, the awkward nature of Mairéad's death meant no one was sure what time to stop the clock. The neighbour set it back an hour, as it was as good a guess as any.

Once word got out and the body got home, the people began to arrive. The windows at the front of the house were dark with the sheets that covered them, like heavy lidded eyes and a lolling mouth. Only a small slit of light escaped every time the door was left agape, the sheets billowed, the house on the verge of waking up. The visitors moved among the sheets, always glancing out of the corner of their eyes at white movement they could never catch. Modern doctrine had extended the rule of reflections to the TVs and tablets. One athletic elderly man wore a sock over his Fitbit.

"Just take it off." His wife hissed at him.

"But, my steps!" He protested quietly.

There were so many people in the wee end-terrace house that the hallway groaned. Though the talk was quiet, the space was loud. Wood gasping, doors slamming. Smokers' lungs choking. No one went near the stairs. No one acknowledged the dark stain at the bottom.

The crowd was middling and politely upset. The guests shared the kindest stories they could think of, the general consensus was that she'd been 'a good soul'. No one could think of anything more personal to say, and the mourners were dry-eyed. Only one old woman was inconsolable. Bridget Banahan could not be talked down from tears. The other women wrapped their arms around her, rocking back and forth, shushing her gently.

"Now, now love, I know. But now she's up'in Heaven with Patrick and the boys," they'd say to her, but she could not be comforted.

"Alone! She died all alone," was all she'd say.

Mystified by the depths of her sadness, people avoided her. The neighbours excused themselves into the kitchen, tutting and shaking their heads once safely out of view.

"Really."

One poured the other a cup of grey tea, "She needs to stop her wailin'."

"Awk, now, don't. Her and Mairéad were right close when they were wee girls. And it's terrible how she went."

"Well, I told her a hundred times to get a stair-chair. An' it's not like she was left out in the woods for a week! They reckon she'd only been there about an hour."

"Still." They both took sips of their tepid brew, "Wouldn't like it to

happen to me.”

“Hmm. Suppose so.”

The pipes of the house clanked, ba-boom, ba-boom. Neither of them could remember turning them back on.

The Good Room was the nicest room in the house; at the very front, with bay windows, and plenty of light to sun-bleach pastoral prints on the walls. Now, it was a morgue of one, with the coffin at the windows.

The statement piece had always been the family mirror, with the crest etched in frosted glass over it. It hung on the same iron chain that had been made for it over a hundred years ago, passing from eldest son to eldest son. Now it was covered with a sheet, and it would be until someone came to take it. God knows who.

This mini morgue had a steady flow of visitors over the three day wake. Her neighbours had come in briefly. They tried not to picture Mairéad’s face when they’d found her; eyes half-lidded, mouth gaping, chin smashed across the ground, neck impossibly bent. They prayed the world’s quickest Hail Mary and scuttled out.

Bridget would not go in. When she worked up the nerve to stick her head into the room, she saw the person sitting with the body was the gentleman with the sock over his hand.

“Oh, hello Bridget.” He smiled, eager to be relieved, “Do ya want to come in for a wee while?” The armchair he was on was under the covered mirror, and he was gently caressed on each side by the huge sheets hanging above. The stopped clock on the wall made the quiet in the room seem louder. When she didn’t answer, he stood and guided her in gently,

“There, there. Ya take yer time, love, take yer time. Just sit here a wee while... There ya go,” He said as he eased her into the chair. She went to say something to him but he had already left the room. Probably to do a lap of

the garden.

The coffin was tasteful, plain, and dark. It was open, surrounded by bunches of flowers, and dozens of mass cards. Enough to make the May Queen envious. Mairéad, who had lived and died alone, suddenly seemed to have many friends.

A memory came back from years ago. The wedding dress, the honeymoon, the moving van.

They’d fought the morning of Bridget’s wedding. Mairéad just began to cry, **This is the end of everything. We’ll never be friends no more.**

Distressed, and then again distressed at her own distressedness, Bridget threw on some anger, as it was easier to manage, **Why’d ya have to do this now? Why’d ya have to ruin it right now?!**

Back then, the priest wouldn’t have you wed if you had make-up on. So there was nothing to hide the red spots on her cheeks and behind her eyes, **You’ll have yer own husband soon, and you’ll put all this silliness behind ya!**

I won’t! I won’t! I’ll be alone forever. Oh, Bridie don’t go! Don’t leave me on my lonesome!

Yer bein’ ridiculous! Stop it! Stop!

She couldn’t remember now how it had ended. Just remembered Mairéad behind her, brushing her hair in silence, sliding the lace veil over her face. They’d hugged, tight and tense. When Bridget walked up the aisle, Mairéad was in the front pew. She’d waved her fingers, an olive branch, and Bridget had smiled back, already burying the moment deep in her memory. Where it would stay for the next 60 years. The world spun on, and it became easier than ever to contact someone, and yet the gap between the two women only grew.

She looked around the room. This was the house Mairéad had been born in, was supposed to be married in. A house for a family that never came.

How many times had she walked down the stairs without even bothering to turn the lights on?

The thought of her friend of 80 years, now dead, was almost too much. Eyes closed forever. Never to smile again. When had they last spoken? When had they last laughed? She lay there and she had laid at the bottom of the stairs, for who knows how long. Maybe all night. Alone. No one to stop the clock. No one to cover the mirror. Alone. Alone.

In the coffin was her friend, maybe. Or maybe just something that looked like her.

She felt herself sink back without moving, like she was on conveyor belt. The sheets moved around her, like two arms pulling her in. Though she knew she was in the chair, her back felt it was against something flat, cold, and smooth. The mirror.

The sheet hung over her head like a swan with its wings tucked in. She'd gone mad in five minutes. She couldn't move, but she could hear something. Faint footsteps. They were coming from behind her. But behind her was only the wall. The wall and the mirror. Muffled footsteps, not shoes, but slippers, on carpet.

Underneath the floorboards, the pipes banged, ba-boom ba-boom, timing up perfectly with Bridget's heartbeat. She could feel a coldness at the nape of her neck. And then, a light scratching at the glass. Polite, almost. Tap, tap, tap. A long nail. Tap, tap, tap.

Bridget could not turn around, she could barely breathe. A lump had formed in her throat like she'd swallowed a tennis ball. She could hear someone trying to speak to her as if through a thick window, too muffled to make out any words.

She shut her eyes tight and felt a few tears slip out. Another series of taps, a little more insistent this time. The sheets rippled around her. The whole world was white.



Behind her, she felt the mirror slightly give outwards. Like it was being pressed from the other side, ballooning convex into her spine. Someone was pushing against it towards her. The tapping turned into a creaking, glass straining against a wooden frame.

“Oh Mairéad, Mairéad...” She croaked out, “I’m sorry, so so sorry. Please.”

The movement stopped. The pause sounded almost curious, maybe a little mocking.

“Sorry I moved on. Sorry I wasn’t here.” She pushed her fist into her mouth and bit down on her knuckles.

“God I missed ya. Every day. Every day. I didn’t think ya’d want to see me no more. I kept thinkin’ we’d make plans, but things just... I had a husband, and then tha kids-”.

The mirror suddenly banged into her, like the two hands on the other side slapped it as hard as they could, **BANG!** It gave Bridget the shock she needed; with a yelp, she scuttered forward, batting the sheets out of the way with flapping hands.

Under the sheets, the mirror, unseen, went **BANG! BANG! BANG!**, interspersed with the sound of glass beginning to chip. It shook so hard that the stopped clock fell from the wall and smashed into bits.

Bridget braced herself against the coffin, hands gripping the edge, “Please, Mairéad! Please! Just leave! Ya’ve been haunting me my whole life! Don’t do it now, too!”

The house wailed around her, the room shaking and swaying, the pipes under floorboards impossibly warm. The coffin trembled under Bridget’s hands. Instinctively, she turned on her heels to grip it better and keep it from falling. She found herself face to face with Mairéad’s corpse.

The undertakers did what they could, but it was impossible to fully scrub the jaundiced yellow from her skin. Her body had surely been badly broken because they’d draped a black satin shawl over her; one that surrounded her whole body. Her face floated like a stag’s head mounted on a wall. Her arthritic bones must’ve been powdered to dust, broken in so many places her body would’ve felt like a sock full of marbles. Bridget didn’t have it in her to think Mairéad looked peaceful there. She just looked old.

“Oh, sweetie,” She whispered hoarsely, and reached her hand down, as if to stroke the corpse’s cheek, but couldn’t make contact, “Oh, my love.”

She felt a tingly numbness all over. Past the dull rumbling of her pulse in her ears, Bridget could make out louder and louder slams coming from the far wall. But she paid it no mind.

She turned her head away. Behind her, glass broke.

Demonology

Livvy Winkelman

Content warnings: death of a loved one, religious imagery, blasphemy, brief mention of chronic illness, sexual harassment

You can't remember the first time your grandmother's ghost visited, but you remember the last.

You have spent most of your life with her spectral body standing a few paces behind your left shoulder. She studies your face, learns the outlines, and tries to mold her bones into something similar. Sometimes, you can hear her sounding out the syllables of your full name, part of it belonging to her. Trying on the four words, mashing them around in her mouth until they sound right— a name that you have always hated, turned into something almost like a prayer just by the clacking of her teeth and the gentle formation of her lips.

She is almost always there, disappears only on Sundays — God's Day. You don't know where she goes, but you know it isn't church. She was the kind of woman that preferred to pray alone, no matter how many prayer chains she led. Your mother told you this, you think. A long time ago.

Maybe your grandmother visits her other grandchildren, halfway across the country. As far as you know, they don't carry her ashes around like you. Maybe that's why they only get Sunday custody — a slot you only partially wish was yours to claim.

[You don't pray anymore, but maybe the whispering of your name could spark some sense of belated holiness, beg of you a brief supplication.]

You have briefly considered exorcism throughout the years. The wielding of incense and holy water, Bible verses spoken in Latin by a priest older than graveyard dirt. The purging of a woman you only knew for the first four years of your life but for some reason decided to weld herself to the sixth notch in your spine, drink out all your marrow, and replace it with demanding.

Exorcism isn't an easy thing, though. It can take weeks. And really, it should be reserved for demons and other girlhood monstrosities lurking under unblemished skin. If her head ever begins to spin around, or your head for that matter, then maybe a priest will be called. Maybe Incense will be burned, holy water splashed. You don't even believe in religion, or God, or the errors of blasphemy— but exorcism? You have always believed in exorcism, in possession, in the loss of [self? autonomy? control? sanity?]

There was that time in ninth grade physics class when she claimed possession over your body, filled your chest cavity with cremation ash and demanded sacrifice of the miniature Bunsen burner sets — the delicate little hairs on your knuckles and the inside of your wrist melting away in the heat. Your lab partner bore witness to the ghostly ruminations of your matrilineal line come to life. He was that football player with the eyes like Bette Davis, the one that kept asking for a blowjob.

You often wonder why she ever wanted to fill your nostrils with the scent of burning. How a grandmother could desire such a thing. But then you think of her limp, lithe body being reduced to nothing but the aftermath of smoking a carton of cigarettes [on the back porch with your mother in early November]. You can almost understand.

An exorcism isn't an easy thing, and maybe that's why you thought about it so much. Considered the acrid cloying smell of cigarette smoke clinging to your mother's clothing, a habit picked up after [...]. Cigarettes are just as good as anointed frankincense, perhaps even holier for they touch on the mouths of loved ones and demand inhalation, exhalation.

You come close to trying it, severing an external possession and sending her back somewhere. But then you remember watching a whole list of possession movies with your mother two years ago. But then the sounds of screaming and begging fill you. But then the image of your grandmother's head, a face that could never be your mother's but is anyway, spinning

around around around assaults your waking mind. But then the idea of sunshine personified being removed from your body by force. But then.

Concept of time does not exist when you're haunted. Concept of time does not exist when you're half-possessed. Concept of time matters not to teenage girls with notches in their spines and smoke as perfume. Concept of time matters not to teenage girls. Concept of time matters not.

The first time your grandmother's ghost appears exists side-by-side with the last time. They live in tandem with one another, or perhaps they are a circle. These moments start with you, and they end with you, too. The common thread being your flesh, your name, the strength of your marrow.

Memories escape you most of the time. Drift through a sieve like dirt, the mesh of your hands waiting to catch the smallest piece of gold. There are the ones that catch, clumped together and painted bronze. Façade undertaking. The second they touch your fingertips they play through your mind like an old movie, pre-recorded laugh track and all.

[There're volleyball tournaments, therapist appointments, lunch table study sessions, round robin disasters, periodic ultrasounds of a uterus with auto-cannibalistic tendencies.]

There are the ones that catch, and the ones that fall through effortlessly. The first time her ghost greets you is included. It continues to elude you, and it is very likely you will never remember, never grasp the fragile strings and knit them back together. Sometimes, though [...], sometimes you allow yourself to imagine it.

Either it is good, or it is not. More often than not, you find yourself imagining a Hollywood-like haunting. You are in your childhood bedroom, in that old house with the water beetles and the cracks in the ceiling. You are in your childhood bedroom, and suddenly she appears at the foot of your bed, lifts a frail finger, all skin and bone. She beckons at you, whispers



things soft and so polite but really, they grate against your skin, dig in and make canopies out of tendon and sinew. Parts of her write themselves on your skin, on your bone, on your soul — they blind you and in the dark you really have no way home.

[By the age of nine you are a scream queen, dressed in white Easter clothes and wearing the remnants of her around your neck, encased in iron.]

Either it is good, or it is not. Less often, it is good, and you look in your mother's mirror and see just yourself, but yourself with something else too. Just a little glimmer of something else, just a fleck, just a reflection of a reflection of refracted light. It is a bubblegum pink kaleidoscope; it is looking at the world through the eyes of that praying mantis that your dad finds holding vigil over the washer-dryer one balmy June evening in 2013. It is the smallest of apparitions, and she's never much of a problem because she is so bathed in light and warmth and something more colorful.

-

The last time your grandmother's ghost made her presence known you are fifteen. Maybe sixteen. Not seventeen. You are old in ways numbers can't ever touch. It is either right before the first quarantine, or right after. [The details are hazy, but the details are always hazy with you. A simile of a person, chronically over elaborating to make up for a lack of precision.]

It is early in the morning, one of those days where the sun shines earlier than it should. You think she wakes you with a scream, or maybe it is a kiss, a bite mark marring the soft skin of your calf. You think she wakes you before she says goodbye, because you looked at her and memorized the planes of her face. Sharp cheekbones hers once more, your name absent from her undead mouth.

[How could a ghost be so physical, so present, and yet seem now like it never once existed?]

She is there and she is not and now you sleep, and you are dreamless.

Maybe all apparitions are just waking dreams, all ghost stories just things that happen while asleep on your feet.

[How could a ghost be so physical, so present, and yet seem now like it never once existed? Why would a grandmother fuse herself to the spine of her second oldest grandchild, live there and burn there and supplicate just an ounce while she watches her live? Rob her of her blood and replace it with confession...]

-

And you think distantly — even if a ghost is full of love, even if a ghost keeps returning to a scene of comfort, even if a ghost caresses your cheek and wears your face, even if a ghost knows your name but not its own — all a ghost is good for is haunting. It's all they can do, all they know how to do, all they will ever do.

The Bust of Roth Hoffmann
Shamik Banerjee

"Oh! the bust's appalling look,
To see, does no man dare.
The archdeacon has seen his spook.
O' children mine, beware!"
Mother utters this every night-
The tale of Roth Hoffmann;
The tale which sends greater affright
Than any lemure can.

The painter Roth, centuries past,
Brought this town disrepute
With ribald artwork that would cast
On church a wild dispute.
The ecclesia of the state
Made him a derelict,
Did his freemanship relegate
And his work interdict.

And when he was departing by,
Gall-paven in despair,
Damned, "Those who shall look at my eye,
Will suffer evilfare.
Whoever near my bust will stand,
Will venom in me flood.
My empuse will hover this land
With nocent eyes in blood."

My brother, one midnight, there went
Filled with cynical youth—
Did behold naught though hours spent,
And proclaimed it 'untruth';
But when he set to leave the place
A dense darkness rose o'er,
A surrect form stared at his face
With eyes carmined in gore!





Binding

Dori Lumpkin

They warned her not to, just like they warned the others. They always did—dozens of warnings, passing through empty lips, falling on deaf ears. Then, she found you. Caressed your damp, tattered corners like you were the most beautiful thing she had ever seen. And you probably were. To one of them, you might be the most singular, most perfect artifact in all of existence.

Her mouth was stitched shut. The woman who found you this time. This was common practice for those who sought out your crumbling pages. They thought it would protect them, that it would keep them from meeting the same fate as all of those before if they could just keep themselves from speaking about it. There were so many of them now, so many desperate for your words after hearing the cries of the first. Not all of them found you, and for the ones who did, even less of them lived.

You enjoyed it; the way their hands scrambled through the dirt, searching for you. They thought you'd bring their lives meaning. They thought you would help them achieve perfection. You don't know who originally planted that idea in their heads but you supposed that anyone could fall victim to your words.

The first was merely that—the first. They weren't special. They found your simple binding at an estate sale in a nearby town. You sat on their coffee table for months before they even considered you. Your binding and the very heart of your words penetrating every corner of their home, tainting it, ruining it. You supposed that was what finally led them to opening you; to reading what you had to say.

They ripped their jaws from its hinges to release the most beautiful sound you could have ever imagined. A sound that echoed across the town, across the world, calling for anyone who would listen.

After that, you were buried by a concerned family member or friend. But that didn't stop them from trying to find you, seeking that call, that desperate perfection released by the first. You made them all scream. The moment they began to comprehend your pages, it was too much, too much, too much.

But they still kept coming. Every time, no matter how deep someone buried you, no matter how long you waited, even when you became covered by forest leaves and dirt and insects, they still managed to find you.

And now she was here, seeking the same thing that so many others had before. She sighed as she cracked your spine open, searching for the words that she just knew would set her free. She began to read, her eyes scanning over you, looking for anything she could consume, anything she could understand, anything that felt comfortable and easy and familiar.

She wouldn't find it. You knew she wouldn't find it, even as you dug your roots deep into her mind, infecting her with your words, pulling her closer to you. The movement of her eyes grew more frantic as they danced across your pages, reading faster and faster, moving closer and closer to her end. Your favorite part was the inevitability.

It became too much, just as it had with the first, just as it would with every person who came after this one. Without warning, she dropped you back to the dirt, clenching her fists and her eyes tight. Then, her mouth ripped open with a painful, wet sound. The seams weren't enough to keep her sewn shut; the pressure of the knowledge was too much to keep her silent. She sang, screamed, shouted, released your song for anyone who would listen. As always, it was perfect. It was beautiful. It would guarantee the next visitor to your hiding spot in the woods.

She screamed so much that her jaw split open, just like the dozens who had come before her. She fell to the ground, no longer silent, blood soaking your pages and seeping into you, building you up—granting you power for the next.

When they eventually find her body, they will not find you. They will mourn her, and talk about the tragedy of another sudden death. By that time, you will have sunk deep into the ground again, readying yourself for the next one.

JULIE

“Scott, please give me another chance. I love you!”

“Julie? Are you drunk? We broke up a year ago! You’ve got to stop calling me.”

“No, I realized tonight how much I’ve missed you. Can we meet for coffee?”

“Julie, I’m with Anna now. I thought you knew that when you saw us at Chili’s a while back.” He added, after a moment, “I’m proposing to her soon.”

“Scott, please—”

“No, Julie. Goodbye.”

Julie sat in front of her laptop, wishing he would change his mind. She wiped her tears away and moved her chair closer to the table.

“Your loss, jerk.”

A little retail therapy was in order, so she logged onto Etsy. There was always something unique there. She typed “breakup” into the search bar, expecting to find items you’d give to your bestie after a breakup.

Breakup gift
Breakup candle
Breakup spell
Breakup kit

This looks interesting, she thought. Violently vibrant text lit up her screen.

Love FIXER



**IF YOU BELIEVE,
SHE WILL LEAVE!
GUARANTEED TO WORK!
NO REFUNDS!
NO EXCHANGES!**

“Oh, what the hell. Why not?” Julie winced at the \$75 price tag for what was probably just glitter and sand but bought it anyway.

ANNA

Two weeks had passed since Scott’s psycho ex had last tried to get in contact. She seemed determined to make a stalker of herself, and Anna dreaded opening her mailbox each day, should she find an undesirable gift from the woman. Nevertheless, she made the trawl each day to check. Despite her anticipation, she was excited to see the RSVP’s to the wedding! She flipped through the pile of envelopes until she came to a package wrapped in pink tape.

“What the hell is this?” She looked at the return address on the pink-wrapped package, decorated in red hearts by Julie. “I can’t believe her. Scott told her weeks ago to go away! We can’t spend the rest of our lives together with her practically stalking us all the time.”

She put the rest of the mail under her arm, then opened the package. An envelope fell out and she tore it in half, expelling a fine blue powder into her face. She sneezed violently several times, her body jerking with the effort. Tears streamed from her reddened eyes.

“Did that bitch poison me?! I’ve had enough!” Anna stomped up the porch steps and slammed open the door.

“Scott!” she yelled. “Where are you?”

“In the kitchen, babe. Fixing dinner.”

She stalked into the kitchen. Scott turned away from the sink to look at her. “What’s the problem? Bad day?”

“You’re seeing Julie behind my back, aren’t you?” Anna glared at him and held the torn card up. “Why is she sending you romantic cards?”

“What? Wait, did you tear that up?”

“You’re damn right I did.” She tossed the card on the floor and walked up to him. “I thought you loved me, Scott. I thought we had a future together.” He put his arms around her.

“Anna, I do love you. I had no idea Julie was going to send me anything. Can’t you see that she’s pathetic? Believe me. She means nothing.” He kissed the top of her head, then turned back to the sink to finish washing fresh spinach. “Dinner’s in ten, babe.”

Anna stared at the back of his head. “Great.” She spied the butcher knife on the counter and grabbed it.

Scott saw her from the corner of his eye and spun around. “Anna, what are you—” Before he could finish, Anna plunged the knife into his throat up to the hilt.

JULIE

Julie turned the local news on just in time to hear the headline: “Anna Gregory was arrested at the home she shared with her boyfriend, Scott Porter. She has been charged with first-degree murder. We go to our reporter Michael Jones, who is at the scene to talk to their neighbors.”

She sat there, mouth gaping. She went to YouTube to look for more information. She clicked on the video that looked the most likely: “Local man murdered by girlfriend. WARNING: GRAPHIC IMAGES!”

On screen, Anna is screaming as police lead her down the porch steps; her arms behind her and hands cuffed. She’s covered in blood; even her face and hair.

“He deserved it! That bastard was cheating on me! I found the card! The love letter!”

The police pushed her head down as they seated her in the back seat of the patrol car, their faces grim. Whoever shot the video captured the car leaving, Anna's face against the window, her eyes impossibly wide and white against her blood-soaked face.

Julie shuddered and exited YouTube. Her mind raced, wondering what had happened.

I found the card! Anna's voice echoed in her mind.

"Oh, shit." Julie realized the wrong person received the potion. But even so, why didn't Anna just breakup with him? Did this happen because of the potion? Was it actually real? Then that meant the store sent her the wrong one.

She logged into Etsy and checked the store name. She looked through the page until she found the chat option. A woman's face popped up in the corner of her screen. "Hello, this is Marie of LoveFixer. How may I help you?" The woman's voice had a lilting quality that would have charmed Julie if the love of her life hadn't just been killed.

"Yeah, I bought a break-up spell from you a few weeks ago, but you sent the wrong one. You sent me a murder spell!" Julie sat back and crossed her arms, glaring at Marie with anger in her eyes. Her lower lip quivered, though, as if she were about to cry.

"How dare you accuse me of such a horrible deed!" Marie started fiddling with one of her large hoop earrings. "There is no such thing as a murder spell, for one thing. And even if there were, it would be terrible bad luck for me to concoct it." She shook her head, and the little bells lining her purple head scarf tinkled gently. "What makes you say this to me?"

"Well, I just found out that my ex-boyfriend's girlfriend killed him today. And I'm pretty sure she is the one who received the spell somehow instead of him. But she didn't breakup with him, she murdered him! It's all over the news!"

Marie didn't say anything. She grabbed one of her many necklaces decorating her black dress and began twisting it with her finger. She shifted her eyes, looking anywhere but at Julie.

"So I'm right, yes? It was a murder potion!"

Marie shifted uncomfortably in her seat. "Hmmm. Okay, I do make special spells for certain... clientele. I guess I could have made an error in shipping."

"An error in shipping? Oh, my god. Okay, listen to me —"

Marie quit messing with her jewelry. Her voice strong, she asked Julie a question. "Tell me, are they no longer together, as you ordered?"

"Are you insane? Of course they aren't together, you psycho, Scott is dead! D-E-A-D, DEAD!" Julie put her head in her hands.

"Then the spell did work for you, yes?"

Julie raised her head and looked at Marie in disbelief. "But—"

Marie shook her head and wagged a finger at Julie. "No refund! Like it says on the website!"

"Wait, what?"

"Please leave a good review since the spell worked for you."

"Don't—"

"Good-bye!"

Scold's Bridle M.L. Hufkie

Some of the most miserable people in life are often the ones who spend all their time waiting for the downfall of others. Leda was such a person. If you shared with her news of a job promotion, she'd point out the long hours, lack of free time to socialize and pressure before begrudgingly congratulating you. Tell her about a new relationship and she'd make it her business to remind you of disastrous past ones while highlighting your role in the perishing of it- before once again wishing you luck, her face reminiscent of someone who had swallowed vinegar. Relay to her the birth of a friend or family member's baby and she'd fall into an endless monologue on the perils of raising children.

Where there was gossip you'd find her. At the forefront. Listening, keeping score, sneering, pontificating, predicting and alas, awaiting disaster and downfall. Like an army general leading her regimen to a battlefield, she led her army of provincial followers without care for the consequences, without a thought as to the destruction their sharp tongues could cause. Leaving in their wake broken relationships, discord, vicious arguments, unsettled minds, and perpetually nervous folks who had not the intelligence or gall to question them.

Lately the thorn in Leda's flesh was her neighbour who had moved in the previous summer with her teenage daughter. The source of Leda's aversion was not because the woman and her daughter were difficult to have around —on the contrary, they were polite, quiet, and obliging. What ruffled Leda's

feathers was their refined intelligence and easy sophistication. Two qualities that sought only to remind her of her own mediocrity. And what further embittered Leda was the fact that neither the woman nor her daughter had one supercilious bone in their bodies.

She would watch them from behind her old-fashioned lace curtains and fantasize about some tragedy or other befalling them while at night she

would be plagued by nightmares in which the neighbour became the town mayor and her captivating daughter, the new beauty pageant winner.

One day Leda came home from work to find the neighbour frantically digging in her backyard. So engrossed was she that she failed hearing Leda's false greeting and blatant curious glance over the fence. Leda entered her house, her mind aflame with curiosity, and as she cooked dinner that evening, she kept peering through her kitchen window hoping to spot why and what the neighbour was digging for. Even more compelling was when night had fallen, and she'd retired to bed, she awoke long after midnight to find the neighbour still digging while her daughter stood watch next to her holding a lantern.

She emerged from her house on the Saturday morning determined to have a chat with her neighbour about the purpose of the mysterious hole. With coffee in hand, she subsequently took a seat on the back patio hoping to catch a glimpse of her. An hour and three coffees later she gave up and went back inside. After getting washed and dressed, she was ready for her Saturday morning trip to town for groceries. She had just locked her patio door when she saw the woman appear in the next-door kitchen window. Her hand froze in a mid-air wave when she noticed that the woman appeared to be engaged in animated conversation. With flailing hands and a rapidly moving mouth she was talking to someone hidden from view. Her uncombed hair and creased clothes made her look dishevelled, something Leda found surprising and pleasing in equal measure.

Who is she talking to? Her daughter? And how is it that she hasn't noticed me? Leda leaned to the left as far as possible but couldn't see who the polemicist in her neighbour's house was. After realising she would be late for her hair salon appointment, she rushed from the house, telling herself to visit her neighbour upon her return. She arrived at the salon just on time, grateful that she would have the undivided attention of the lead stylist whose talents were regionally praised. She said her hellos to the sea of familiar faces, paid her rehearsed compliments and listened with half an ear to discussions about the church bazaar. The salon was full, and after getting her hair washed and taking a seat for her haircut, she strained her ears for the latest gossip.

“I hear Lulu left her husband.” The speaker, one of Leda’s biggest supporters, was having her purple hair coloured and waited for the shocked what? from the audience before continuing her narrative with a lopsided smile.

“Yes, I heard from Ans. As the wife of the vicar, she knows everything. Apparently, Lulu’s been cheating with that foreigner who runs the art gallery. He...”

A blazing hairdryer interrupted her and before the thread could be recovered another woman was telling, with great vigour, about her brother-in-law whose company had gone bankrupt. Leda shook her head and smiled to herself. She had neither husband nor child to steal her joy and she was glad of it. The stylist was doing a great job and Leda complimented her.

“Thanks Missy. I have been meaning to ask you. How’s that neighbour of yours? Seems like a decent type. Is it true that she moved here from Cape Town? Why anyone would want to move here is beyond me.”

It was common knowledge in town that the stylist harboured dreams of one day opening a salon in the mother city, and travelled there every summer. Every January she would lock the salon for a month, leaving the ladies who were desperate for her artistic styling destitute. She would then return two shades browner, her skin radiant, her eyes alight full of appraisal for a city she loved. It was also common knowledge that her continuous cooing over the beachside city irritated many of her clients, who were too desperate for her services to vocalize their annoyance.

“Oh well, she’s alright. But last night I...”

A hairdryer being turned on full blast broke her off, and she shifted in her chair hoping to get a chance to talk about the events from the night before. Just then the neighbour’s daughter strolled through the salon doors. All heads turned towards her. She greeted and sat herself down with a friendly hello. Leda studied her in the mirror. The girl had a vacant beauty

about her. Her face didn’t reveal much and the few times she had caught her eyes, they appeared to be veiled. Even when she smiled her eyes were guarded, with no indication of what she thought or felt. She became aware of Leda’s gaze on her and looked up. She smiled. Her straight white teeth shone like porcelain and Leda felt a chill run down her spine. Her eyes were different now. There was an overt challenge in them, the hazel depths maliciously sparkling. The girl held her gaze and Leda suddenly felt a stabbing ache in her head. She tore her eyes away.

By the time she got home, her feet and head were having a contest in the ‘who can hurt more’ department and she stumbled into her house, leaving the shopping in the foyer.

After taking an aspirin she sat herself down and poured a chilled glass of white wine. She had taken two gulps when her doorbell rang. Lazily getting up, she sipped the last of the wine as she opened the door. In front of her stood the neighbour. Cleaned up and fresh faced, not a hair out of place.

“Leda, forgive the intrusion. I was wondering if you wouldn’t mind joining my daughter and I for a few sundowners. I realise that we haven’t really seen much of each other the last few days.”

About to decline, Leda changed her mind when reminded of the hole in the garden.

“That would be lovely. Just let me put my shopping away and I’ll be right over.”

Twenty minutes later she knocked on the door of the next-door residence and was led to the lounge. As usual she looked around, scanning every drape, pillowcase, chair, and ornament. Wine in hand, she traipsed the length of the room looking at a series of pictures on the walls.

The neighbour had gone to the kitchen to fix some snacks and she had ample time to quell her curiosity. She came to a standstill in front of one picture, mouth agape. Depicted was a barren moonlit landscape, with a big

goat sitting in the middle. All around the goat were haggard women, young and old, looking at it with reverence. Some of them had infants in their hands which they appeared to be offering whilst the corpses of three dead infants hung from a stake. She shivered.

“That picture is my favourite.”

“Oh God Cordelia! You scared me.”

When the neighbour’s daughter appeared she couldn’t say, but the girl now stood behind her, her dark hair blending in with the black dress she had on.

“I am sorry Leda. I didn’t mean to. That picture you were looking at is my favourite.”

“But it’s awful! How can anyone like it? It’s simply...”

Again, the girl smiled, again the sight of her teeth was distressing, wolf-like. But Leda stood rooted until the neighbour appeared with a tray of snacks. *Yes, she’ll have another drink.*

“Mother, Leda doesn’t like your picture.”

“Which one?”

“Witches’ Sabbath.”

“Oh, but Leda, that’s my pièce de résistance. Of course, nowhere near the original. But it’s a wonderful copy of it.”

It was after the third glass of wine that she started feeling ill. A menacing headache made her lean forward, resting her head in her hands.

“What’s the matter dear Leda?”

“I am sorry I feel awful all of a sudden. Would you happen to have an

aspirin and some water?”

“Cordelia, would you mind getting Leda something?”

Cordelia left the room and returned with a tall glass of water and an aspirin. Moments later she was feeling better and decided to ask about the hole. Mother and daughter cast each other a conspiratorial look.

“We thought you’d never ask. Come with us.”

They took hold on either side of her and laughed; she joined them. Before she knew it, they were outside. The moon was full and high, with not a breeze disturbing the evening silence. It felt strangely ominous. The hole seemed to be lit within.

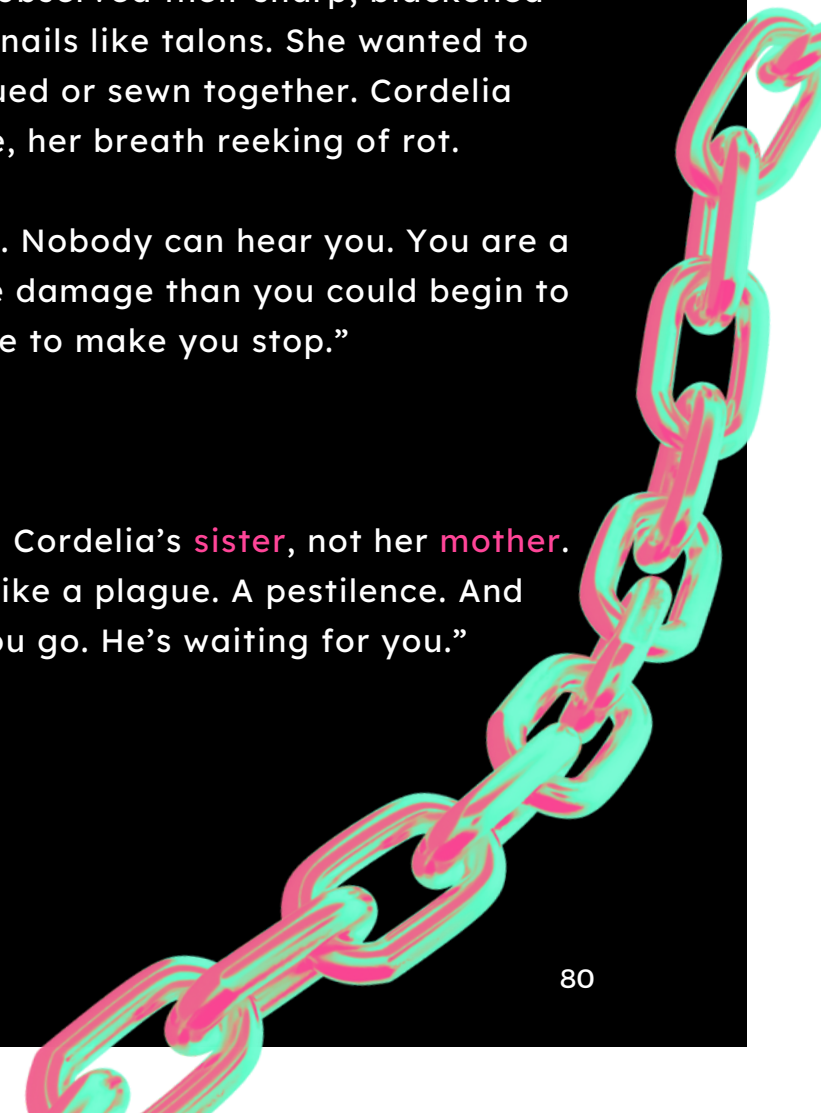
“Wow, it’s huge. But what’s its purpose?”

Realising that they had let go of her hands she turned to look at them and drew in a sharp breath. As the moonlight cast on their faces, a maddening panic rose in her chest as she observed their sharp, blackened teeth, hollow cheeks, grey hair, and fingernails like talons. She wanted to scream but couldn’t, her lips seemingly glued or sewn together. Cordelia leaned forward, her eyes filled with malice, her breath reeking of rot.

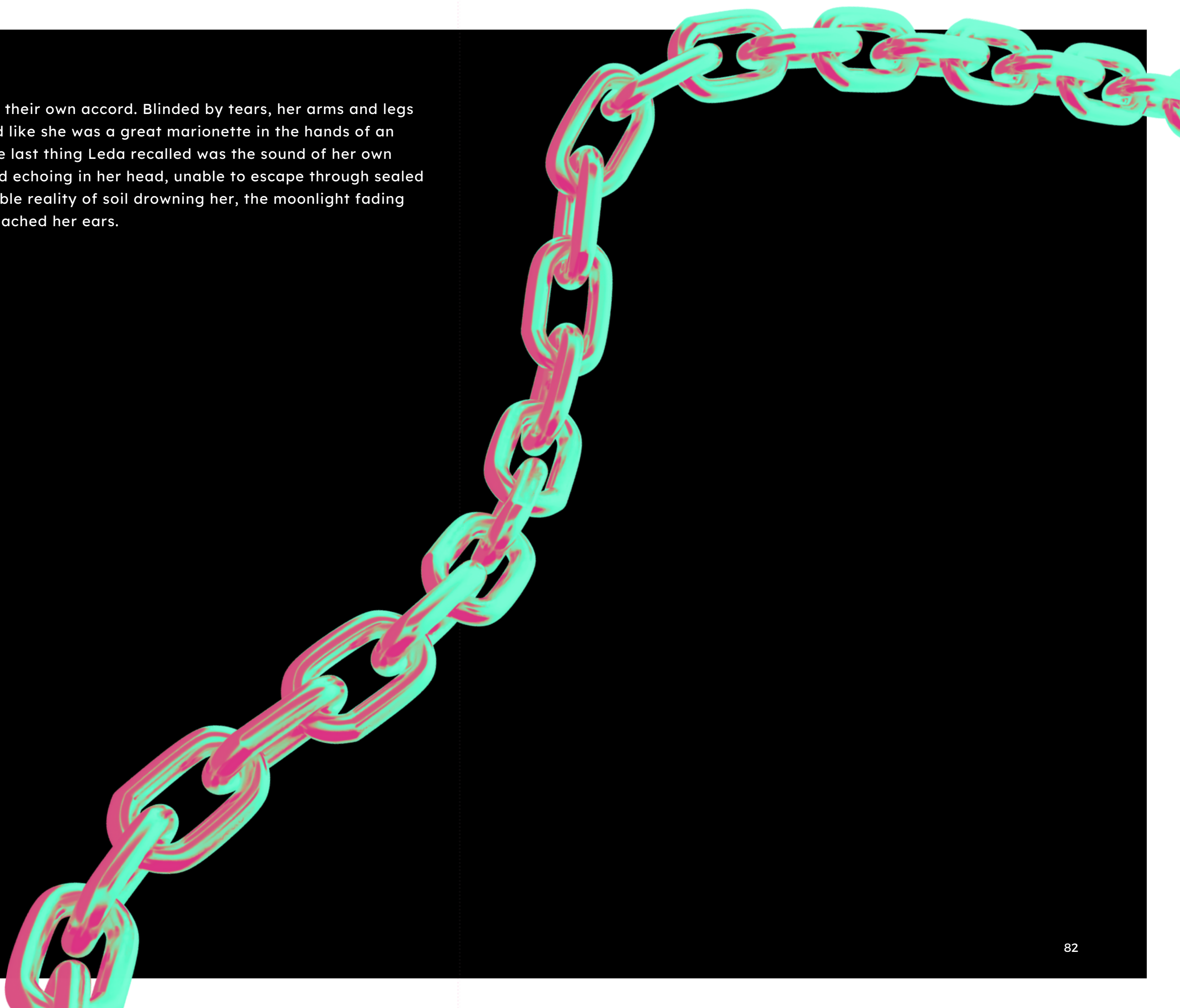
“Dear Leda, there’s no point screaming. Nobody can hear you. You are a disease, Leda. Your tongue has done more damage than you could begin to imagine. So, my sister and I were sent here to make you stop.”

Sister?

“Don’t look so surprised. Yes, I’m Lilith, Cordelia’s *sister*, not her *mother*. Your bitterness, envy and awful nature is like a plague. A pestilence. And now, you will meet your downfall. Down you go. He’s waiting for you.”



Her feet moved of their own accord. Blinded by tears, her arms and legs propelled her forward like she was a great marionette in the hands of an expert puppeteer. The last thing Leda recalled was the sound of her own screams vibrating and echoing in her head, unable to escape through sealed lips. And the unbearable reality of soil drowning her, the moonlight fading as cackled laughter reached her ears.



The Plight of Professor Pyle

A.L. Davidson

Early one Wednesday evening, in a little shop on the corner of Main Street, a ruckus was about to unfold. Miss Eloise, proprietor and owner of the aptly named Miss Eloise's Acid and Apothecary, was happily tending to the patrons that flooded in after an unforeseen rainstorm had so rudely cancelled many plans.

Wick and Willow, the bulbous toads she kept as pets, croaked happily from their container behind the counter. The smell of hearty coffee and scrumptious tea cakes filled the building and wafted out through the partially open windows, mixing with the earthy notes of the falling rain. It smelled of autumn.

The heavy shawl sweaters and thick woolen scarves draped around the students signified a change in the weather. Heads were adorned with wide brimmed hats and spells were cast to de-wrinkle the papers damaged by the downpour.

The local ghost hunting group, eager for the rain to kick up activity at the cemetery they planned to investigate that evening, donned their weatherproof black jackets and swapped out baseball caps for beanies. A map of the town was spread across the table, held down by cameras and to-go coffee cups.

Miss Eloise bounced back and forth between her customers, tending to everyone with haste and care. With a tray of mugs in her hand, she approached the far table where two young witches sat pondering their spell books and a homework assignment with a curious conjuring requirement in its instructions.

"Miss Eloise!" a voice called from the front of the cafe.

"Yes, Zeb?" Miss Eloise asked as she set the steaming teas down for the little ones.

Zeb, the head of the ghost hunting group, pointed behind him, "Lose a cat?"

Miss Eloise's sharply shaped eyebrow cocked upward before her eyes shifted to the front door. Just beyond the glass, dripping wet with frantic motions in its little paws, stood a cat. It was most definitely not Pantyhose, the adventurous tabby that belonged to Mrs. Penwick next door. Nor was it Monsieur Beauregard Applegate Weatherspoon - Esquire, mind you - the overweight Maine Coon that proudly took up residence in the library across the street.

She did not recognize this friend. But she did recognize the bowtie around his neck.

"Oh dear, this blasted rain is making a mess of everything, now isn't it?" Miss Eloise inquired - mostly of herself - as she approached the front door. The bell overhead jingled as the glass panel opened.

"Finally! Miss Eloise, I need your assistance!" the cat cried with frightful fervor in its voice, startling the patrons with the unusual sight.

Zeb, overreacting as always, whipped out his rosary and holy water-filled squirt gun, then aimed them both at the feline, "It's possessed!" he yelped.

Miss Eloise picked up the sopping wet newcomer, "Now Zeb, I will not have you spraying my patrons with holy water, especially on a day as wet as this! Put that thing away before you douse Molly, they only just received their scone. There will be no exorcisms today!"

"Miss Eloise, that cat **spoke**. Even in a town as weird as this, that's not normal," Zeb replied as he holstered his bright pink plastic pistol. He waved apologetically at the wispy spirit sitting by the fireplace indulging in an orange-vanilla pastry, "Sorry, Mols."

"S'okay," Molly replied, not lifting their eyes from their book.

"This is no cat, my dear! This is Professor Pyle!" Miss Eloise said with a

giggle as she pointed to the signature bowtie.

“And I’m not possessed, I’m cursed! Miss Eloise! Oh, Miss Eloise! I require your assistance in this matter, it is of the utmost importance!” Professor Pyle said shrilly as he shook the rain water from his tail.

Depositing her friend atop a nearby table, Miss Eloise waved her hand and summoned a plush purple towel to help dry his fur. Professor Pyle - now in the body of a Peterbald - lifted his front paws with woe in his motions as he pleaded for assistance. A loud purr reverberated from his body once Miss Eloise began to dry him off.

Zeb, hands on his hips, leaned over to look into the bright yellow eyes of the professor. This was the strangest thing he’d seen all week, and he’d fallen through a mirror on Monday and had dinner with Bloody Mary herself. Usually, things this wild and whimsical saved themselves for the weekend. What a treat!

“Fiddlesticks, Miss Eloise! The longest and most abrasive of fiddlesticks!” Professor Pyle wept.

“Language, Wolfgang, there are children present,” Miss Eloise reminded.

“Whatcha get into, Prof? Usually you’re the one causing mischief, not having it done to you,” Zeb asked.

“I haven’t the foggiest! I was working on next week’s lessons when the rain came in and, oh, it was such a pleasant change of scenery! So much so that I decided to take a catnap in my office. Just for a moment! When next I woke, I looked like this!” the professor replied, absolutely aghast at the rudeness of it all.

Miss Eloise pursed her lips and placed her hand against her chin in thought. This was not how she imagined spending her Wednesday evening, but she was never one to leave a friend in dire straits, especially when the education of future spell-casters hung in the balance!

“I suppose we should head to your office to figure out what trickery is afoot, shouldn’t we? Molly, would you be a dear and mind the shop for me?”

Miss Eloise asked.

Molly’s black, disc-like eyes blinked slowly as they lifted their head from their book, “I don’t mind at all,” their voice reverberated from their translucent, mouthless form.

“Wonderful, let us go and be back before we’re missed!” Miss Eloise said with a stomp of her heeled boot.

The motion ignited one of the many spells woven into the faux leather fabric and a quick-hop circle appeared beneath them. She scooped up Professor Pyle and grabbed hold of Zeb’s arm and whisked them both away to the Uni down the street, picking up papers and wiggling the wind chimes as they went. The last thing the patrons heard was Zeb’s surprised yelp before the circle closed.

The trio re-appeared in the middle of Professor Pyle’s prestigious office. Stacks of books lent this way and that, teetering on the verge of toppling if one were to move just a hair too quickly. The window was half-obscured by a tall plant and the old, worn down armchair where thousands of papers had been graded was covered in the clothes the professor had once been wearing. The smell of a candle at the end of its wick lingered among the scents of wood and paper.

“Wolfgang, has anything untoward or unsightly happened as of late?” Miss Eloise inquired as she fixed the ruffles of her skirt.

“Of course not, you know I aim for strict precision and perfection in my workspace,” the professor replied, appalled at the accusation.

“Why... did I come along, Miss Eloise?” Zeb asked as he fixed his beanie.

“You’re a ghost hunter!” she noted.



“Yes?” Zeb replied, obviously confused.

“And what, pray tell, do ghost hunters do best?” Miss Eloise proposed.

Zeb cocked an eyebrow up, “Reveal the things no one else can see! I’m on the case, Miss Eloise!” he proclaimed proudly as he raced off toward the nearby oak desk.

A heavy, exaggerated exhale escaped Professor Pyle’s lips, “If he destroys my office—”

“Hush now, Wolfgang, your office is already beyond saving,” Miss Eloise chided as she made her way toward the window to look for any wards or warnings that may have been activated by the sudden downpour earlier in the afternoon.

The trio got to work, scouring signatures and studying scribbles for something amiss. Well, they did, until Professor Pyle was quickly distracted by a bug and gave chase, unable to fight off the primal urges of his new feline-frame. Still, Miss Eloise and Zeb diligently surveyed the area. The wood was searched for markings of ill will and the professor’s clothing was looked at stitch by stitch, but nothing stood out as ominous or unique.

“What were you doing before you took your nap, Prof?” Zeb inquired as he picked up the professor’s discarded spectacles.

“Grading papers,” Professor Pyle replied with an aggravated whip of his tail.

Zeb looked at the messy desk, at the sextons and quills laying about, the drips of ink that soaked into almost everything and the cooled cup of Miss Eloise’s chamomile special. Stacks of papers with big red markings in the corners sat spread across the chaos. It would seem that Professor Pyle’s recent quiz on alchemy and manipulation had been hard on his students. Many low letters in the alphabet could be seen with harsh circles around them.

That's when he noticed a peculiar annotation poking out from behind a test. He pulled the paperclipped stack from underneath the rest and smiled to himself. He held it up for Miss Eloise to take. She snatched it up with her darkly painted fingers and studied the private notes the professor made about this particular student. A heavy chuckle followed.

"It appears you're going to have to change some of your grades, Wolfgang," Miss Eloise teased as she held the paper in front of the professor's eyes.

Spread across the test were the once hidden markings of a transformation spell, crafted to activate the moment the professor placed a low grade upon its upper corner. The student had been slacking and suffered from a bad attitude. She seemed to always be up for a fight when it came to the old fashioned manner in which the renowned Professor Pyle taught, and he did not appreciate her more modern, lackadaisical attitude toward his lectures.

So, knowing full well she'd fail the test due to the manner in which she showed her work, the sneaky student took everything she'd been taught and turned it against the professor. Using his own methods against him, she decided to show her work in another manner. And, she pulled it off expertly, much to the chagrin of Professor Pyle who suddenly realized what had occurred.

"Teenagers, I swear," Professor Pyle grumbled.

"She showed her work and executed the spell with perfection, I think this is deserving of an A," Miss Eloise noted.

"Maybe an A+, she did turn a wolf into a pussycat with ease," Zeb added with a chuckle.

"I won't turn back unless I amend it, will I?" the professor inquired with an exasperated sigh, his pointed ears folding atop his head with defeat. He picked up one of his quill pens with his tail.

"Maybe it's time to modernize your lectures, learn from the youth and discover new ways to look at the world. You are well over a hundred years old, we don't want you turning into a curmudgeon now, do we?" Miss Eloise reminded him as she held the test steady for him to correct.

Professor Pyle quickly signed off on the paper and, in a puff of purple smoke, transformed back into himself. He snatched up his educator's robe and draped it over his body before he placed his glasses back atop his nose. He thanked the kind volunteers who helped him with his plight and sat down in his armchair to reassess his students' handiwork.

"Are you going to go easy on her?" Zeb inquired as he hoisted himself up onto the desk.

"I suppose she did complete the assignment, I can't be too hard on her," he admitted.

"Nor should you. Who knows what she may change you into next. Remember, curses are only charming until they happen to you," Miss Eloise noted with a wide smile and a wink.

What an eventful Wednesday it was.

About Our Authors

In Order Of Appearance

Laura Bibby

Laura Bibby (she/her) writes poetry and stories that weave her love of nature with the strange, fantastical and ominous. Her work has found homes in Nymphs, Moss Puppy Magazine and Selenite Press, among others, and her debut poetry chapbook *A KNIFE IN THE DARK* was published by Bottlecup Press in 2022.

Instagram & Twitter/X: @bloomurder

Website: www.laurabibby.com

Hannah Ascough

Hannah Ascough is a PhD student in Global Development Studies at Queen's University, on unceded Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee territory; her recent publications are housed primarily in academic journals, while her creative works can be found in *Fathom*, *The Octopus*, and *The Coast*.

Twitter/X: @hannahascough

Alexandra Weiss

Alexandra Weiss is trying and failing to grow superhot chilies. Sasha is an American studies graduate student, an editor of *Another Chicago Magazine*, and the author of *autumn is when the ghosts come out* (Blanket Sea Press, 2022).

Instagram: @transmasc_demon

Twitter/X: @cactus_ghoul

JP Relph

JP Relph is a working-class writer from northwest England, mostly hindered by four cats and aided by copious tea. She volunteers in a charity shop where they let her dress mannequins and source haunted objects. A forensic science degree and passion for microbes, insects and botany often influence her words. JP writes about apocalypses quite a lot (despite not having the knees for one) and her post-apoc flash collection was published by Alien Buddha Press in June 2023 and is available on Amazon. Stories in *The Ghastling*, *Wyldblood Press* and *Dark Winter Lit*.

Twitter/X: @RelphJp

Website: www.therelphian1.wordpress.com

Yasmine Diaz

Yasmine Diaz is a New York native and an avid playlist creator. When she's not trying to craft fictional plots via music, she's watching horror movies, taking pictures and taking up sketching hands.

Twitter/X: @librarants

Briana Zelkova

Briana is a neurodivergent poet from Tennessee. She is obsessed with surrealism, hates Ernest Hemingway and can be found gazing out of windows.

Twitter/X & Instagram: @anairbda

Jay Pallas

Jay was raised in New Zealand but returned to England for University where she also began to write fiction in her spare time. Inspired by folklore and fairytales, she loves to apply extraordinary twists to ordinary scenarios with a focus on fantasy and horror. She has previously written short stories for *Bandit Fiction* and designed cover art and illustrations for multiple self-published fantasy works.

Sara Roncero-Menendez

Sara Roncero-Menendez (she/her) is a writer based in Queens, NY, and has published stories and essays in several outlets, including *Points in Case*, *Sad Girl Review*, and *miniskirt* magazine, as well as a poetry chapbook, *Graveyard Heart*. She is also a journalist and PR professional, writing about movies, television and books.

Twitter/X: @sararomenen

Instagram: @sararonceromenendez

Bobby Wells-Brown

Bobby is a long-time lover of cosmic horror, and fantasy fiction. Over the last 10 years he has studied to achieve Bachelor and Master's degrees in writing and media - he has continued this into his professional life having worked in travel journalism, copywriting, media production, and publishing. His fiction focusses on the ideas of epistemic distance, cosmic philosophy, and Death as a character. Despite these dark themes, he loves to bring detailed and compelling visual descriptions to his work, which is often inspired by the likes of HP Lovecraft, Phillip Pullman, and Eric LaRocca.

Twitter/X: @BobbyWellsBrown

Grace Magee

Grace Magee is an Irish writer based in Belfast who loves spooky stories (but always regrets hearing them).

Twitter/X: @grace_e_magee

Livvy Winkelman

Livvy Linz Winkelman is a writer and poet currently pursuing a BA in creative writing. She can often be found obsessively curating her Spotify or haunting her university's library. Her work has been published in *Grim & Gilded* and is forthcoming in various publications.

Twitter/X: @vacantteeth

Instagram: @livvyofthevall3y

Shamik Banerjee

Shamik Banerjee is a poet and poetry reviewer from the North-Eastern belt of India. He loves taking long strolls and spending time with his family. His deep affection with Solitude and Poetry provides him happiness.

Instagram: @where_tales_end

Dori Lumpkin

Dori Lumpkin is a queer writer and graduate student from South Alabama. Their work has appeared in Susurrus and Diet Milk Magazines, and is forthcoming in many other places. They love all things speculative and weird, and strive to make fiction writing a more inclusive place.

Twitter/X, Instagram & TikTok: @whimsyqueen

Website: <https://dorilumpkin.carrd.co>

Sheri White

Sheri White's stories have been published in many anthologies, including Alice Says Go Fuck Yourself (an ezine), I Cast You Out, published by CultureCult Press, Flashes of Fantasy, published by Wicked Shadow Press, Tales from the Crust (edited by Max Booth III and David James Keaton), Halldark Holidays (edited by Gabino Iglesias), and HWA's Don't Turn Out the Lights (edited by Jonathan Maberry). Her collection, Sacrificial Lambs and Others, was published in 2018.

Sheri lives in Jefferson, Maryland with her husband Chris, their daughter Lauren, their three black cats (Lucy, Sadie, and Vlad), and two dogs (Dobie and Josie). Their other daughters Sarah and Becca fled the scene last year.

Amazon: <https://amazon.com/author/sheriwhite1965>

Twitter/X & Facebook: @sheriw1965

M.L. Hufkie

M.L. Hufkie was born in Cape Town in 1984. Her birth, during the last desperate years of South Africa's apartheid policy and subsequent childhood in a country on the brink of change and plagued by political unrest has left a profound impact on her. Growing up in a religious and very traditional household in a township called Bishop Lavis she has always been fascinated by topics around politics, religious dominance, the impact of patriarchy, social change, and the occult. With a minority voice in the UK, and the world at large her aim is to challenge dominant narratives from a minority perspective. She recently completed her MFA at Birkbeck working on a novel entitled Voices from the South. She's previously published two short stories with MIR Online.

She enjoys reading, writing, running, and cooking and has worked as a teacher, librarian, administrator, and archivist. She's currently seeking new employment whilst also looking into the possibility of continuing her studies by applying for a PhD.

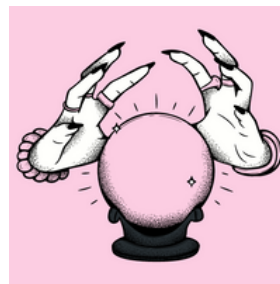
A.L. Davidson

A.L. Davidson (she/they) is a writer who specializes in massive space operas and tiny disturbances. She writes stories about ghosts, grief, isolation, space exploration, eco-horror, queerness, and the human condition. She is the author of three web novels, The Wayward Souls of Avalon, Lonely Planet Hotel, and The Night Farm, the R-PNZL: A Futuristic Fairytale series, and her debut eco-horror romance novella, When The Rain Begins To Burn, released in October of 2023. They live with their cat Jukebox in Kansas City.

Twitter: @MayBMockingbird

Instagram: @MaybeMockingbird

Website: disturbancesbyalycia.weebly.com



DIVINATIONS MAGAZINE