

A WITCH-RUN LITERARY MAGAZINE

NOIL & TROUBLE



ISSUE 01

MAGGIC

NOLL GRIFFIN · KIMBERLY KUCHAR · DAITHÍ KEARNEY · OWOLUSI LUCKY · K.A. HONEYWELL · RUTHENIUM · HALLE MERRICK · KIMBERLY SEWELL · MONA MEHAS · INDRANIL GHOSH · PETAR PENDA · SUZANNA LUNDALE · VIO · HELEN GWYN JONES · NEIL CHAMBERS · ELIZABETH BELL · JACOB FORD · OLIVER FOSTEN · ALORAH WELTI · JESSE GABRIEL · LINDSAY PELLICCIA · GABBY GILLIAM · STEPHANIE M. WYTOVICH · MELISSA NUNEZ · LAUREN ORTEGO · AMANDA LONG · CARLY CHANDLER · MIRJANA M. · BEATRIZ SEELAENDER



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EDITOR'S LETTER

October 2022

Writers and artists alike will surely agree that words and tools are inherently magical. How brilliant is it that we can string sentences together to make the most beautiful pearl of a piece? How incredible is it to pick up a brush, a pencil, a lump of clay and use it to make your imagination a reality? How enchanting an act is it to transport readers and viewers to other worlds, into other minds? It's magic!

And so, magic seemed like the very best theme for this, our inaugural issue.

Each piece from our wonderful contributors uniquely explores that which makes the world go round (especially for us witches). They have found magic in a whole plethora of places: the fantastical, the everyday, the people they love, nature.

However, some contributors have explored not finding magic at

all and provide a different perspective. And that is what makes this varied issue so very exciting!

If a piece strikes something in you, we encourage you to share it with others. Writers and artists' socials can be found at the end of their biographies—make sure to follow and tag them to show your appreciation of their work.

Before you turn the page, dear reader, I want to thank both you and our contributors for making this magazine happen.

For the witches amongst you, beginner or experienced, this issue includes three simple spells you may find useful for this time of year that have worked for me in the past (pages 58-59). I wish you a successful Samhain!

Happy Reading,

Millie Godwin

CONTENTS

Night Spell	
NOLL GRIFFIN	05
Moon-Eyed	
KIMBERLY KUCHAR	
Two For You	
DAITHÍ KEARNEY	06
Tonight	
OWOLUSI LUCKY	
Grandmother	
K.A. HONEYWELL	07
Galaxy Rain	
RUTHENIUM	08
The Witch and the Willow Tree	
HALLE MERRICK	09
The Hanged Man	
& The High Priestess	
KIMBERLY SEWELL	20
Lauren's Haunts	
MONA MEHAS	
Magic Enough	
INDRANIL GHOSH	21
Conquering the Chaos	
PETAR PENDA	
at the house of mirrors	
SUZANNA LUNDALE	22
the faerie ring	
VIO	23
Goblet & The Familiar	
HELEN GWYN JONES	25
Goblin Couture	
NEIL CHAMBERS	26
Supper	
ELIZABETH BELL	27
The Fork	
JACOB FORD	28
Wolf Skin	
OLIVER FOSTEN	29
Baba Yaga	
ALORAH WELTI	34
Swamp Magic	
JESSE GABRIEL	35
Christabel Revisited	
LINDSAY PELLICCIA	36
Baths are Less Magical	
as a Grown Up	
GABBY GILLIAM	43
Honey Jar	
STEPHANIE M. WYTOVICH	44
Scrim & Amber & Grounded	
MELISSA NUNEZ	45
The Magic of the Powerless	
LAUREN ORTEGO	46
A Witch Comes to Call	
AMANDA LONG	48

My Mother's Hands Have Never
Known Magic
CARLY CHANDLER 55

The Current Lore
BEATRIZ SEELAENDER 57

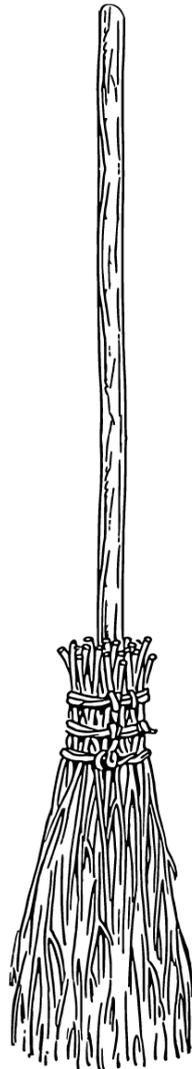
3 Simple Samhain Spells 58

Hecate
MIRJANA M. 56

LIST OF TRIGGER WARNINGS:

- Food & eating – p. 27
- Mild description of violence & murder – p. 29
- Mention of deliberate animal death – p. 34

If you think a trigger warning for a particular piece of work should be included in this list, please email us at toilandtroublelitmag@gmail.com



Night Spell

ARTWORK BY NOLL GRIFFIN



ABOUT THE ARTIST: Noll Griffin is a digital illustrator and linoleum printmaker, originally from California but now living in Berlin, Germany. He is also a singer-songwriter with a few bedroom-recorded albums to his name and many memories of nights in the local open mic scene for acoustic folk artists. His visual art takes a particular focus on conservation and curiosity for nature in its most unusual and ephemeral states, combining the unlimited possibilities of digital art with his love for the punchy lines often utilized in lino printing. Noll's art has been featured in *Zanna Magazine* and *Aothen Magazine* among others.

Instagram: @nollprints

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Moon-Eyed

POETRY BY KIMBERLY KUCHAR

moon-eyed mama:
a universe in her nest
hatching from an egg

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Kimberly Kuchar has always loved writing. Before she knew her letters, she created books with squiggly lines and scribbled pictures. She could always “read” the stories to her mom. Recently, Kimberly has mainly focused on writing short-form poetry and has also written haibun and collaborative linked-verse poetry. Her work has appeared in multiple journals and podcasts, including *Prune Juice Journal*, *Cold Moon Journal*, *Failed Haiku*, *the Starlight SciFaiku Review*, *Scarlet Dragonfly Journal*, *Five Fleas (Itchy Poetry)*, and *The Haiku Pea*. Kimberly lives near Austin with her husband, son, and pet cockatiel. Her bird is currently whistling and begging for attention.

Two For You

POETRY BY DAITHÍ KEARNEY

Walking along the canal bank today
All troubles were calmed by the stillness
I saw a lone magpie and waved him away
Not wishing for sorrow or sadness
Then I spied a pair, ahead on the grass
Another pair high in the trees
Behind was another alone near some thrash
And overhead suddenly flew three

Like life, the numbers were varied and mixed
Unpredictable, they came unexpected
There was sorrow and happiness, marriage and death
All came and all unrepentant
As am I, as I smile and I think about life
Each day, I learn something new
I see different magpies, wave loners away
But with you, it always is two

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Daithí Kearney is an Irish poet and musician. From Co. Kerry, he now lives and lectures in Co. Louth on the east coast. His poetry is inspired by his surroundings and his young family. His poems have been recently published in *Paddler Press*, *Patchwork Folklore Journal*, *TMP Magazine*, *The Minison Project*, and *Bubble Magazine*.

Tonight

POETRY BY OWOLUSI LUCKY

You are part of the universe;
A seed born from immortal stars
Let your mantra this night be
“I know, I am no black hole,
I am a nebulous, soon I shall
Burst into stars.”
Tonight, you’re an expression of
All that was, is, and will ever be
You’re magic that delights
The night stars.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Owolusi Lucky is a Nigerian. He writes poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. He has published or has work forthcoming in *Noctivagant Press*, *Crosscurrent*, *America Diversity Report*, *Afrorep*, *Decolonial Passage*, *Zoeticpress*, *Hallowzine*, *Scars Publication*, *Sweetie Cat Press*, *Macromicrocosm*, *Dietmilkmag*, *Collegevilleinstitute*, *Overtly Lit*, *A Solarpunk Anthology*, and others. He shares his thoughts at: Africanmighty.art.blog

Twitter: [@mighty_scribe](https://twitter.com/mighty_scribe)
[Linktr.ee/Mighty_Scribe](https://linktr.ee/Mighty_Scribe)

Grandmother

FICTION BY K.A. HONEYWELL

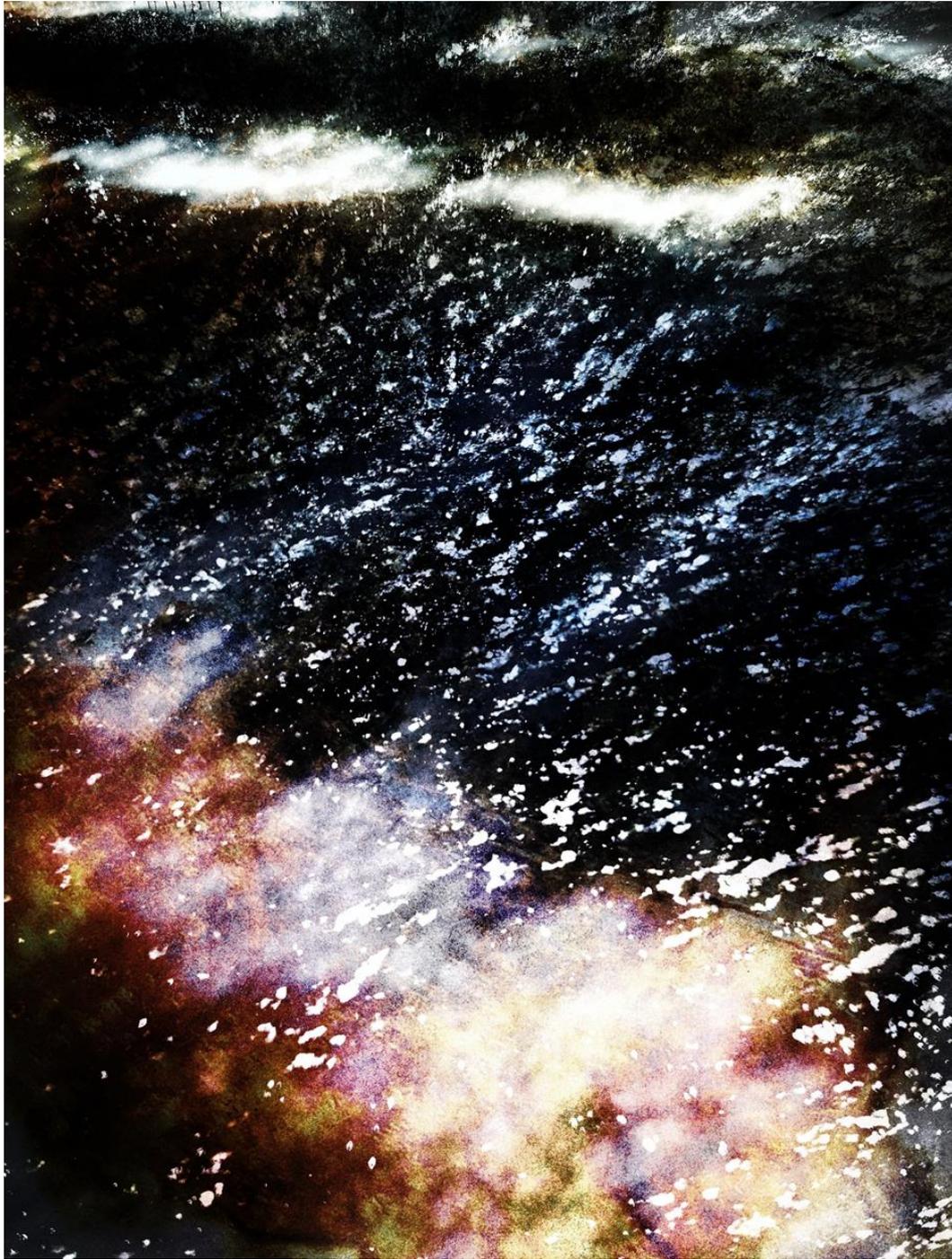
Where did they all come from? The children are squealing, clattering piglets on her wood floors. She hunches over her sewing and tries to ignore those heaving pink bellies. Her thread is red and strong between thick-knuckled fingers that are always moving, twitching and pulling at strings even in her sleep. She pulls at her red thread like drawing entrails from a carcass. She smiles at a memory. Her stitching never falters. It changes the fabric in her hands from what it had almost been. Just a little change for a little time, she promises. It’s been so long, though, that she’s not certain it’s a promise she can keep. She smiles again. The children are everywhere and have to be collected. One of them transforms from piglet to herd dog until they are all gathered around her. She holds her changed garment open to the children, and they crawl inside to explore the mysterious folds. With a clap, she flattens the fabric. She severs the thread with her teeth.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: K.A. Honeywell has written short stories, poetry, and a novel called “Damn Wilds”. She can be found online at kahoneywell.com.

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Galaxy Rain

ARTWORK BY RUTHENIUM



ABOUT THE ARTIST: Ruthenium (they/them) is an artist currently living in the state of uncertainty. They believe creativity is real-life magic and are obsessed with texture, context, light, and the question “What if...?” Their art has been published in *Rabble Review*, *Celestite Poetry*, *Vulnerable Magazine*, *Messy Misfits Magazine*, and *Warning Lines Literary*, among other wonderful places. Their various presences and publications can be found at linktr.ee/Ruthenium.

Twitter: Ruthenium_Art

Instagram: Ruthenium_Art

The Witch and the Willow Tree

FICTION BY HALLE MERRICK

The residents of Roseporth were not unlike the rest of the world – they were not kind to those they did not understand. The town had always prided itself on its welcoming arms with which it embraced those who joined them. As long as they showed no signs of being different. You would not find the different in Roseporth.

Except, that is, for the Witch.

The Witch lived at the very edge of Roseporth's borders, and if you were to ask anyone, they would tell you she had always been there. And just as the residents of Roseporth steered clear of the Witch, she too avoided them, separated from the rest of the world by a towering willow tree. And for many years, longer it seemed than anyone in Roseporth had been alive, this unwritten agreement was upheld.

Until one gloomy afternoon, when a young girl by the name of Tara Shaw was forgotten after school. This was not unusual for Tara, whose parents were far too busy with work to fuss over a child they hadn't particularly wanted in the first place. On this afternoon, Tara had waited for an hour and a half before taking it upon herself to walk home alone. Her house was at the other end of the town, and it was raining. But Tara had a raincoat, and she did not mind walking home alone. She was alone a lot.

She walked and walked and walked until the rain won out in their battle and she was forced to seek shelter. The only trouble was that she had walked far enough that the houses of her schoolmates had disappeared, and she was left with only one option. One horrible, unthinkable option.

The house of the Witch.

No. She couldn't go in there. She may never return, trapped in eternal agony in some twisted spell of hers. She went to turn around, to brave the rain and find another house, *any other house*. But as she turned, the cottage's garden caught her eye. Entranced, Tara approached, unable to stop her feet from moving ever closer to an inevitably terrifying doom.

As Tara unwillingly walked towards the one place she had been told never to go, she could not help but think that this Witch's home did not look nearly as terrifying as she had always been told it was. The huge tree that stood tall on the edge of the garden seemed to bend to welcome her as she opened the iron gate and walked inside. The garden was adorned with flowers of impossible colours, and she was certain that the rain was not as heavy here as it had been just moments ago.

But then the girl looked up at the building itself, and the small sense of safety that had started to build inside of her dissipated. The ivy that climbed up the walls was almost black, and the front door looked like it was rusted

shut and had not been opened for many, many years. Tara begun to wonder if perhaps the Witch was even still alive – after all, nobody would ever be any the wiser if she had died in her home, her corpse still lying there as it rotted through the floorboards and spread wickedness underneath the entire town. No. There was no point speculating about horrid half-possibilities.

Shadowed by the cottage, the girl felt the sudden urge to flee, but she couldn't stop her hand from lifting and knocking on the door.

For a moment, there was nothing. She nearly left. Then a hand reached through the wood and pulled her inside. She screamed, kicked, cried, but the grip on her was firm and Tara was small, and she feared this was how she would die. It served her right for being foolish enough to step foot in such a place. But then the pulling stopped. Tara opened her eyes and gasped.

This was it. She was really inside the house of the Witch. It was so... peculiar. The walls were covered with ivy that mirrored what grew up the front of the house, but this time it had little blue buds covering it, just about ready to bloom. The wooden floorboards were almost entirely covered in moss, from which grew a wooden table and chair, a tiny kitchen, and a wooden bed frame. There was a quilted blanket on the bed, a fire going underneath a pot, and a clear view of the willow tree through the window by the door. But what pulled Tara's focus from the darkly enchanting indoor garden was the old woman stood opposite her, a hand still latched around her own from where she had pulled her inside.

The Witch.

The Witch did not speak. She watched the small girl stood in front of her, soaked through with a school bag dripping water and ink at her side. A girl who looked terrified and curious and was the first face she had seen in quite some time.

“Why have you come to my home?”

Tara was silent, wide-eyed.

“Don't you know where you are? Did your parents not tell you to fear me?”

“They did.” Her words came out as a squeak, as every warning she had ever heard about the monster stood before her rushed through her head. “But it was raining, and there were no other houses nearby.” She did not mention that she hadn't wanted to come here, that she had been pulled by a force she couldn't see and couldn't fight.

“Nobody wants to live near someone so cursed. Are your parents not looking for you?”

“No. I was walking home from school.”

“Are you not a little too young to be walking home all alone? And in such bad weather?”

“I'm nine. And my parents work a lot.” It struck Tara as she spoke that this was the Witch, and she should not give her too much information. She should

not be here in this place of nightmares to begin with. But she did not feel scared, not like she had always thought she would. “I’m Tara.”

The Witch did not respond. She turned away and hobbled over to where the pot above the fire was screaming. She took out two cups and poured the liquid from the pot into them, set one on the table and cupped the other in her hands. Tara did not budge.

“If I wanted you dead for intruding in my home, I would not have pulled you inside.”

This was true. Tara picked up the cup and took a sip and couldn’t hide the smile that came with it. Hot chocolate.

“Why did you pull me inside?” The Witch did not answer. For a moment they were silent, sipping their hot chocolates as they eyed one another, until Tara’s curiosity got the best of her once more. “It’s just, everyone says that you’re wicked. So why did you let me in?”

“Maybe I wanted you here, alone and defenceless, to kill you without ever having to leave my home.”

“You just said that you didn’t want me dead.”

“And you believed the word of an old, wicked witch?” The Witch chuckled, and Tara glanced at the door. If she ran, she might be able to escape before the Witch could catch her. She was old after all; Tara could easily run faster than her.

The Witch seemed to be able to read her mind, because with a flick of her wrist the door swung open.

“The rain has stopped. You should get home before your parents start to worry you’ve been stolen by the Witch.” Tara could’ve sworn the Witch winked at her then.

“You’re letting me leave? Why?”

The Witch did not reply. Before Tara could say another word, she was outside and the door had been slammed shut behind her.

She glanced back at the house as she turned to leave, and it didn’t look quite so scary in the sunshine. She thought she saw the Witch watching her from the window, but when she looked again nobody was there. And so, with no way back into the house, and no real reason to stay, Tara continued her journey home. She hoped that she had not been gone too long and that, as the Witch had said, her parents would not worry. But when she got home, they hadn’t even noticed she wasn’t there.

∞

Tara knew what she was doing was wrong, and that if anyone in the town was to find out they would surely call her evil and corrupted. But she couldn’t help it – the Witch had not killed her. And although it wasn’t raining again when

Tara walked home from school this time, she still stopped at the Witch's house.

As she stepped through into the garden for a second time, the willow tree bent to her once more. She placed her hand on its trunk, and it warmed beneath her palm as if acknowledging her presence. Her hand remained warm as she knocked on the door of the cottage once more, and for a moment nobody answered. But then, just like last time, a hand reached out through the wood, and pulled her into the house. Tara did not scream this time.

The Witch watched Tara with a slight squint as the girl got her bearings back – being pulled through wood is not as easy or smooth as one might think. Tara gave the Witch a small smile.

“Why have you returned?”

This was a question Tara could not answer. She didn't know why she hadn't walked straight home from school, nor why she had gone out of her way to come to the edge of town and see the Witch who hadn't invited her back. She had some strange sort of morbid curiosity with the evil that stood before her now, because she was starting to believe that she may not be as wicked as everyone had said. If she was, Tara would surely be dead already. She did not say any of this.

“I needed help with my homework.” It was a poor reason. But then the weirdest thing happened: the Witch laughed. And it wasn't an evil laugh that she had always imagined her making, hunched over a cauldron as she brewed a potion to kill the children of Roseporth. No, it was joyful, and surprised, and *good*. And the Witch looked at the girl again...

“Why would you come here for help? You have parents do you not?”

“They're at work again. And they wouldn't be very good at this.”

“Why not?”

“We have to write a story.” The Witch stared at her blankly, so Tara gave a further explanation. “They don't like stories. They're better at smart things.”

“So you think I'm not smart?”

Tara's eyes widened as she realised what she had just implied to the Witch, and hastily sputtered out a string of apologies.

The Witch smirked. “What is your story about?”

Taking this as a sign that she could stay, Tara sat down at the same seat as yesterday and pulled out her exercise book. The Witch allowed this and turned to once again pour two mugs of hot chocolate for them.

“Well... I want to write it about you.”

The Witch stopped suddenly and turned around, mugs full, and for a moment Tara worried that she would be turned into a toad right there and then. But the Witch didn't look angry. She looked... confused?

“Why would you do such a thing?”

In truth, Tara wasn't sure. If she handed in a story about the Witch, a story that told people she had spent time with the old woman, well she had no idea what would happen to either of them. And yet she was eager to learn more about her, about why everyone just assumed that she was evil. And this, it seemed, was the way she had decided to do it. But she didn't say any of this. She shrugged and opened her exercise book. The Witch remained frozen in her spot.

"Are you okay?" The Witch seemed even more startled by Tara's question, and the sincerity with which she asked it. After a moment she regained her composure, placed the mugs in front of them, and sat down in the seat opposite Tara. "So can I write my story about you?"

The Witch pondered the question and hesitated for just a moment longer. But how could she say no to this girl who wasn't afraid of her and was the first person to talk to her in so long? "What would you like to know?"

"How did you become a witch? Why does everyone think you're evil? Why don't you leave the town if everyone here fears you? Why aren't you evil?"

"That is a lot of questions." She paused. "Why don't we start off with just one?"

"Okay. How did you become a witch?"

"That is quite a long story. Are you sure you want to hear it?"

"Yes!"

"Very well. Then we shall start at the beginning."



Cassandra Benson moved in when the year turned cold and you could see your breath freeze in the air. At the very edge of the town, in a little cottage with a garden full of flowers of impossible colours and ivy-covered walls, she started her life in Roseporth. She arrived at the town alone, and nobody knew who she was or why she was her age and living without a husband or father to provide for her. Roseporth, as I'm sure you're aware by now, tends to shun those who do not fit its ideals.

And while Cassandra refused to sacrifice her opinion for theirs, Evangeline Hopkins did not have quite the same backbone. The daughter of one of the founding families could not be seen breaking the rules – she was an upstanding member of the community, and her parents preferred it to stay that way. She was prim, perfect, proper, everything she was supposed to be. When her father told her to avoid the strange new girl who had moved in, she did – like the dutiful daughter she was.

Cassandra had moved in at just the right time to mingle, because it was at this point every year that they would hold the Winter's Dance in the square. It was a tradition that everyone looked forward to, where people came together

and shared food and danced to music under the light of the stars as they welcomed in the winter season. And this was where Evangeline and Cassandra met for the very first time, and Evangeline found herself utterly enchanted by the woman stood before her.

Around them the air froze, which meant that everyone was bundled up in layers of warmth to beat it back. But not Cassandra; no, she stood there sleeveless and proud, dancing as if the cold had absolutely no effect on her. And when her eyes locked with Evangeline it was as if the entire event slowed, and then disappeared entirely. As ridiculous as it might sound, even Evangeline could feel the cosmic connection that pulled them together, leading Cassandra over to the fire where she stood.

“Why do you not dance? This is a time of festivity, is it not?” What a way to introduce yourself. Of course, Evangeline already knew her name – the rumours that had already begun to spread around town had made certain of that. “Do you talk at least?”

“Of course I talk.”

“So you just don’t dance then?” A mischievous smirk worked its way onto Cassandra’s face, tugging at her lips as the composure and grace of Evangeline faltered.

“I.. it’s far too cold to dance. I have no idea how you aren’t suffering from frostbite already.”

“Would you like to know my secret?” Cassandra leant in close and whispered in her ear. “It’s because I’m a witch.”

When she pulled back to a normal stance, she could see the shock and fear on Evangeline’s face. Why would you tell her such a damning secret? But then Cassandra threw her head back and laughed, as she took Evangeline’s hand in hers. The warmth that seemed to have bubbled around her spread through to them both.

“Dance with me, Miss Hopkins? I promise not to put a spell on you.” But it was too late. She already had.

And for once, as Cassandra led Roseporth’s perfect daughter into the middle of the square and pulled her close as they danced under the stars, Evangeline did not care that everyone was watching them and whispering. Let them have their whispers, and let them spiral into rumours tomorrow. Tonight, she had the stars, and the music, and Cassandra, and the world was magic.

∞

“Why did you stop?” So enthralled in the Witch’s story, Tara hadn’t realised that she was practically sat on the table now. She had leant forward so far in

her chair it was as if she was trying to climb into the story and join it. The Witch smiled at her and gestured to the mugs.

“Your hot chocolate is finished. And it’s getting late. You should return home.”

“No! I want to hear the rest!”

Somewhere along the way, Tara had realised that this Witch did not scare her anymore, and so she didn’t fear the fact that she had just demanded a continuation from her. The two stared at each other, engaged in a silent blinking contest, as if that would change the Witch’s mind.

Tara blinked.

“Another time perhaps. You should hurry home; it’s getting dark. Your parents will no doubt be worrying, and we wouldn’t want that.”

Tara knew for certain that they wouldn’t, in fact, be worrying about her or her whereabouts, but she thought it best not to argue. After all, she wanted to hear the rest of the story, so she should probably stay on her good side. She thanked the Witch for her hot chocolate and her story and made her promise that she could come back tomorrow and hear the rest of it. The Witch agreed, less reluctantly than both had thought she would.

And home the girl went, her mind alive with stars and dancing and magic. And just like she had expected, her parents were not in the slightest bit surprised or concerned that she had been out so late. If only they knew where she had been, and where she would continue to go.

∞

Tara’s visits to the Witch became something of a secret routine that she looked forward to the entire day at school. She would have to stop herself from running to the Witch’s house to avoid suspicion from the parents walking their children home, and when she finally arrived at the cottage she would greet the willow tree, pressing her hand to the bark. And then the Witch would pull her through the wood before she could even knock – she would never admit it of course, but Tara was certain that the Witch looked forward to the visit as much as she did.

Tara hurried to take off her coat and sit down, practically bouncing in the armchair. The hot chocolate was already on the table in front of her. At last, the Witch sat down opposite.

“Are you sure you want me to continue? This story is not going to get a fairy tale ending.” In response, Tara took out her exercise book and pencil, and looked eagerly at the Witch. “Very well.”

∞

In the weeks that followed the Winter's Dance, Evangeline had never felt more alive. Her life was suddenly more than just her father's rules. Since she and Cassandra had danced all night together, the townsfolk had started to talk, and she knew her father had begun to grow suspicious. She knew she had to be careful.

It didn't take her very long to master sneaking out of her bedroom window without making a sound. And then she was free, sneaking along the edge of town towards the cottage, where Cassandra was always waiting for her.

The two would spend hours together, doing absolutely anything and everything. So long as they were in each other's company, the activity didn't matter. Evangeline taught Cassandra everything about the town and proper society. It was something Cassandra truthfully had very little interest in conforming to, but she listened intently to every word and rule. In return, Cassandra taught her the ways of the Witch.

She taught her everything she knew, from the phases of the moon to the names of all the different herbs in her garden. She showed her the grimoire that had been passed down through her family, each generation of Witch leaving their mark in the book.

"Have you ever added anything to it?"

"Once. When I was little I drew myself on it. Here." She flipped through the pages until she came to one on herb combinations, where a tiny drawing of a stick figure Cassandra sat in the corner.

"Was your mother not furious at you when she saw it?"

"No. But she did say it wasn't a very good resemblance of me."

"Well, that's true. It's a terrible likeness."

Cassandra gasped dramatically at this, which earned her a light slap from Evangeline. Cassandra caught her hand and pulled her out into the garden before she could object, where the rain soon joined them.

Evangeline went to complain – her dress was new, and her father would have a fit if he saw her like this. But she didn't get a chance because, before she knew it, Cassandra was kissing her. Softly at first, hesitantly, but then Evangeline kissed her back, and the rain was a million miles away as they embraced. Before long, the two of them were lying together in the rain-soaked grass, both out of breath, crimson and hazel hair tangled together.

For a while they were silent, content listening to each other's heartbeat and watching the stars. Well, Cassandra was watching the stars. Evangeline had her eyes entirely on the woman by her side. The woman who had changed her life, who she would do anything for. The woman she loved.

As Evangeline walked home that night, she let her mind wander to the future, one she now knew she wanted to spend every moment of with Cassandra. Everything about her was magic. And when Evangeline was with

her, she started to feel the magic in her too, and she didn't ever want that feeling to go away.

But try as she might to hold onto it, life wouldn't let her. As she climbed through the window of the bedroom, she found her father stood in her room. One of her father's men pushed past her and slammed the window shut. He locked the window and pocketed the key. She opened her mouth to try and come up with some explanation as to where she had been. But her father spoke first.

"Evangeline Hopkins, you have lied to me, deceived me, and embarrassed me."

"Father, please."

"Do not interrupt me. Thomas Hewitt's daughter saw you and the Benson girl together." She had never seen him look like this. So... cold. "She is not even in schooling yet. Think of the example you are setting for her, for all the young girls in this town."

"I am setting no example for them."

"Except you are, because you are my daughter, and people in this town look to me for what is right. Your... misguided acts have put a shadow over our family."

"Father, that was never my intention." In fact, her 'misguided acts' should not have involved him, or anyone in this town, at all. She could've sworn she saw him soften slightly, remember that she was his daughter.

"I know." But then the coldness returned. "It is the Benson girl. She has poisoned your mind." *What?* "There has been talk around the town, rumours of her unsavoury nature, her wickedness. She is a Witch." This was true, but the way he said it, it held none of the truth. Yes, Cassandra was a witch, but she was the furthest thing from wicked that Evangeline had ever known.

"Cassandra has placed no spell on me. Everything I have done has been of my own will."

"No. You are confused. Your mind has been fogged by dark magic. Once the Witch is dead, you will feel better."

"Dead? Father, what have you done?"

"You will remain here." He took a step towards her, took her hand in his. "We will take care of this Evangeline – this Witch will not corrupt you any longer."

Before she could utter a protest, he was walking out of the room, the door slamming shut behind him. She tried to follow, but the door was locked. She was trapped.

No. This couldn't be happening. She had to get out, had to find Cassandra. She had to save her.

So, she did the only thing she could think of. She took the chair by the dresser and swung it high above her head, shattering the window into

hundreds of tiny fragments. Nobody came running into her room, so she had to assume that they had all already left for Cassandra's cottage. Which meant she had no time to waste.

When she arrived at Cassandra's, gasping for breath, she smelt the fire before she saw it. The smell was suffocating, smoke going into her mouth, nostrils, lungs. It was burning everything beautiful in sight. But it was the screams that froze her. It was Cassandra screaming out in anguish, screaming for help. Screaming for her. And when she forced herself to look at the scene before her, she nearly collapsed. A huge pyre had been driven into the soil at the edge of Cassandra's garden, and she was tied to it at the hands, feet, and waist. They were going to burn her alive.

Evangeline couldn't let this happen. But she had no idea how to stop them. They were surrounding Cassandra, and she couldn't very well fight them all off to save her. She'd end up burning alongside Cassandra. No, she had to find another way. Cassandra must have something to stop them in the cottage – she was a Witch. There must be some spell to resolve this, to give them their happy ending. The men had their backs turned to her, so Evangeline took her chance and ran into the house.

It was a mess. The furniture was overturned, bottles lay smashed on the ground, and the grimoire was ripped apart, pages scattered across the floor. The family grimoire, destroyed like it was nothing. That was when Evangeline felt something start to bubble up inside of her, as she looked around this place of magic and love that had been torn apart without remorse. It was rage. Rage for the town that had raised her, rage for the father that had betrayed her, rage for the life that she and Cassandra would never get.

She dropped to her knees as the realisation settled. This was it: Cassandra was going to die. They would never get a life together.

And then she saw it in the corner of her eye. A page. Half torn, but still legible. A page that might just work.

Outside, her father lit the match, and dropped it onto the pyre. Evangeline watched from the broken window and began the incantation.

“Spiritus Aquilonis, Meridiem, Orientem, Occidentem. Ego invocant te tueri, amica mea. Et adducam eam in pace, ut illa, ut reliqua.”

As the incantation ended, Cassandra looked up, and her eyes connected with Evangeline's. And then everything happened at once.

The smoke got heavier and clouded everything in sight.

There were shouts as the fire died out. And then the smoke cleared.

Cassandra was gone.

Where she and the pyre had been now stood a towering willow tree, separating the town from the cottage. The men stood there silent, staring. And then they turned to run, this taste of magic that they had just experienced obviously being too much for them. But no, they would not get away. They had

wanted a Witch to fear, so she would give them one. Taking another page from the floor, Evangeline spoke once again. This spell was easy – a single word.

“*Ignis.*”

The garden reached up to the men and set them alight. It burned until there was nothing left of them to grab onto, and then it disappeared as quickly as it had come. Leaving Evangeline alone.

She stepped out into the garden and stopped at the foot of the willow. Gingerly, she placed a hand on its bark, which seemed to warm beneath her touch. And she knew that the spell had worked. She spent the rest of the night watching the stars, never taking her hand off Cassandra.

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“And that is the end.” The Witch watched Tara as she finished her story. The girl was uncharacteristically silent for a moment, working through what the Witch had just told her in her head. And then Tara grinned.

“The tree was warm when I touched it too. Does that mean I’m a Witch? Will you teach me spells? I’m a really quick learner! Oh! I could be your apprentice!”

The Witch smiled.

“Perhaps another time. But for now,” Tara knew what the Witch would say before she said it this time, it’s getting late.”

“But I don’t want to go home yet! I wanna hear more stories!”

“Why don’t you come back tomorrow, and I’ll see what I can do.”

She ushered Tara out of the cottage, promising once again that she could return, and keep returning. And as Tara started to walk home, she turned around to say goodbye to the Witch. But she was preoccupied, sitting by the willow tree and staring at the stars.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Halle Merrick (she/they) is an English writer of the magical, the peculiar, and the whatever-thought-pops-into-her-head. She is currently living in Falmouth, Cornwall, and is a recent graduate of Creative Writing. They would very much like to live in a haunted house with a legion of ghost cats one day and would be very grateful to anyone who knows how to make that happen. They currently have stories in *Haunted Words Press* and *Filter Coffee Zine*, and they are the founder and editor of *Haunted Words Press*.

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The Hanged Man & The High Priestess

ARTWORKS BY KIMBERLY SEWELL



ABOUT THE ARTIST: Kimberly Sewell is a creator based in Pueblo, Colorado where she lives with her husband and their clowder of cats. Kimberly's writing and artwork can be found in *Yuzu Press*, *Voidspace Zine*, *Snowflake Magazine*, and more. She is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing from Regis University and hopes to someday write and illustrate books for children and adults. You can follow Kimberly's art and kitten fostering journeys on her social media.

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Lauren's Haunts

Inspired by the Art of Lauren Curtis

POETRY BY MONA MEHAS

Lost in trees my soul awakens within
Salem Blue Tree, gnarled watcher of dead
Bamboo takes me back. Abstract? I was there
Lone tree at Winter House, anyone here?

Faded Garden, splash of color on gray
Lost in trees my soul awakens within
Dark deep, Solitude; Thicket, night or day?
Dew of Autumn morning, Pinedrops, we find.

Tree of lights inside Barcelona Church
Blue Peacock, iridescent tree for tail,
Lost in trees my soul awakens within
I Dream of Trees twice, wake and share the tale.

A tree supports my home with lock and key,
In Tree of Life Mandala, I must be
For if not Her Fury of mind I'll seek
Lost in trees my soul awakens within.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Mona Mehas (she/her) writes about growing up poor, accumulating grief, and climate change. A retired, disabled teacher in Indiana, USA, she's at her laptop most days with two old cats as chaperones. Previously, Mona used the pseudonym Patience Young. She's published in *Moments Between*, *Backwards Trajectory*, *Loft Books*, *Last Stanza Poetry Journal*, and others. During the early pandemic, she watched every Star Trek show and movie in chronological order and many online concerts.

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Magic Enough

POETRY BY INDRANIL GHOSH

My father's green Vespa turns thirty-eight today. He bought it in his thirties. My last memory on the beast is my ride with him to the so-called Gargantua's magic show. What an amusing stage name for a magician! Made us laugh hysterically on our way. I was eight and was terrified of magic, but so was my father! Although, we had each other. I do not remember the tricks and stunts at the show; however, I do remember how flabbergasted he was at the performance exhibited that evening. Oh, that comical face! I smile, realizing the particular face will be sketched on my heart forever. That is magic enough to me.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Indranil Ghosh is a Ph.D. student in applied mathematics, currently residing in New Zealand. Highly inspired by Nirvana, Led Zeppelin, and Robert Frost, whenever he is not working one may find him either reading classic poems or listening to music from the 70s and 80s.

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Conquering the Chaos

ARTWORK BY PETAR PENDA



ABOUT THE ARTIST: Petar Penda is a professor of English and American literature (University of Banja Luka, Bosnia, and Herzegovina), literary critic, and translator. His translations have been published in renowned journals in the USA and the UK. His poetry and flash fiction have been published in *Fevers of the Mind*, *Lothlorien Poetry Journal*, *A Thin Slice of Anxiety*, *Trouvaille Review*, *Amphora*, and other journals.

at the house of mirrors

POETRY BY SUZANNA LUNDALE

in a house of mirrors
truths emerge
to the artist's gaze
inviolate
crystal balls in sockets
where otherwise,
eyes would be

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Suzanna Lundale is a lifelong writer and observer of the world who grew up in Phoenix, Arizona, and has made her home in many places since. She is passionate about language, history, travel, dogs, and the loved ones – real and imagined – who form her galaxy. Her dual heritage, Latinx and Scandinavian-American, and her identity as a witch actively inform the complexity of her worldview and fascination with questions of identity and liminal spaces. Suzanna has been featured as a special guest poet in literary magazine *The Crow's Quill* and tweets new poetry and fictional vignettes daily as @SuzannaLundale.

the faerie ring

POETRY BY VIO

beware the faeries
your mother would say

... listen <

buttercup-faced and lily-scented
they're hard to resist
two-lipped and rose-hipped
you just can't look away

... go out <
... stay home

here at the entrance of the forest
twinkling eyes greet you
like a sister from another father
what do you do?

... enter <
... leave

they guide you by the hem of your dress
to a clearing in the woods
where sunlight sprinkles in a halo
inviting you to dance

... say yes <
... say no

giggles shared among them
but you can't understand
they just tug you along
then push you at the start of the song

... dance <

they lace daisies into your hair
decorate dewdrops on your skin
with your cheeks so flushed

you almost forgot where you've been

... dance <

they beg you
stay, stay until dayspring
but you tell them
you can't, your mother's waiting

... dance <

your legs skip on their own
your body's out of control
you reach to grab onto a piece of cloud
but only slip deeper down

... dance <

as they shimmer and flutter above
the magic dust sinks in
turning you into a pale mushroom
one more for the faerie ring

...

... replay <

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Vio is a singer and songwriter for the loves that never were. A little shy most of the time, her true self only comes out in karaoke rooms. You can fawn over clouds with her at [@violieu](#) everywhere.

Instagram: [@violieu](#)

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The Familiar & Goblet

ARTWORKS BY HELEN GWYN JONES



ABOUT THE ARTIST: Helen Gwyn Jones (she/her) started recording her world at the age of eight when she bought a Brownie camera from her sister, something which has become a lifelong passion. A collector of the past (hers and other people's), she likes nothing better than muted images of imperfection. May be found poring over Welsh grammar books when not photographing drains or going into raptures over rust. Recently published at *Acropolis*, *Paddler Press*, *Pareidolia Literary*, *Blink Ink*, *Hecate*, *Moss Puppy*, *The Levatio*, *Camas*, *Storyteller's Refrain*, *Full House Literary*, and *Subliminal*. Can be found online @helengwynjones

Goblin Couture

POETRY BY NEIL CHAMBERS

Hair trimmers lie next to a box of hair dye,
Flecks of red and pink stain the floor, walls and sink
Landlord-grey paint turns burgundy
From a chrysalis, I emerge, my genesis.

Fishnet stockings disguise the scales on my thighs,
Long claws hide beneath my sleeves.
Bugs, mud and leaves cling to the fabric.
Goblin chic is trendy with us mavericks.

Nowadays all I know is how to be myself.
I resist the urge, daily, to watch my mental health
reduced to ash like so many others,
I take a deep breath and refuse to smother

the flame.
It burns behind my eyes — you will not find shame
beneath these feathers.

It's a queer way to live. But I'd rather
be a goblin - my heart and guts a home
for bugs and birds as I become

One
with the forest -

than pretend I'm like you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Neil Chambers (they/he/eir) is a sci-fi and fantasy author from the Midlands. They are currently studying a master's degree in Creative Writing at the University of Derby. Neil's work explores gender identity, mental health, and the line between human and inhuman. Neil is trans nonbinary. Their identity, along with their childhood in the Staffordshire countryside, inspires their poetry, as well as his upcoming novel "Before I Eat the Moon".

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Supper

POETRY BY ELIZABETH BELL

After years of starvation, I plucked the moon out of the sky like a nectarine, fat and bitter, and swallowed it whole. Juice dribbled down my throat like liquid mercury, my esophagus warm with gentle celestial swelling, a tennis ball drizzled in honey. It was a bloated August moon which sat high in my stomach, dripping slowly into acid like sugar in absinthe, before dropping; the whole bleached lump submerged in latte foam. I swallowed a spoon backwards to help it dissolve.

The stars, neither sweet nor savory, burned my tongue like pepper; cracked, black, and coarsely ground. Kernels like whole fingernails caught in the crepe paper layer between teeth and gums, eased out over time by toothpicks. Spotted ladybird ulcers crawled up through the wet cave of my mouth, antsy and sore. Once extinguished, the stars were nothing but seasoning; long-dead and lacking substance. The night's own empty calories.

I took a straw and drank the sky to wash it down. It fizzed as I sipped at it, the grapefruit flavour of sunrise clinging to my cheeks. It tickled the roof of my mouth as it went down, moving from refreshing and light to treacly and dark. Sauvignon notes of cassis, licorice, and concrete; the aftertaste of a multistorey car park at night resting on the tip of my tongue. I should've known better, of course. The syrup always sinks to the bottom.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Elizabeth Bell (she/her) is a twenty-four-year-old queer poet. Having completed her degrees in Creative Writing (BA (hons), York St John University) and Poetry and Poetics (MA, University of York) she currently lives in the Cotswolds, where she spends her free time reading, writing, and listening to Billy Joel.

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The Fork

ARTWORK AND COMMENTARY BY JACOB FORD



You ponder a fork. Which road will you take?

“The Fork” was painted on the Samsung Notes app.

ABOUT THE ARTIST: Jacob Ford (he/they) discovered his love for writing in high school despite dreadful English teachers and continues to hone his talents while sunlighting as a software engineer. His creative pursuits include performing live poetry and music, penning novels, and fingerpainting moonlit scenes on his phone.

Wolf Skin

FICTION BY OLIVER FOSTEN

The path was too clearly marked by the wear of feet and wheels for anyone with sense to lose their way. Even then, the forest was gentle enough that, so long as one made sure to whistle or sing to themselves, they could forage or gather kindling in peace. It was only once the moon rose that the accord between human and nature dissolved, and anything could happen if one or both parties hungered enough. Even outlaws knew better than to frequent the woods once twilight fell.

And knowing all this like she knew her own name, she left the path behind her, waiting for something to find her that knew even a hint of mercy. The grip around her basket could have belonged to a marble statue. Her decision was made, but her body only knew the risks that came with spilling the cheese, bread, and other offerings Grandmother demanded. Now, Grandmother could gnash her teeth and thrash about all she pleased. It wouldn't overturn the basket or breathe life back into her granddaughter.

Despite being the precursor and successor to every wrenching memory Grandmother carved into her, the forest remained a wondrous place. Time flowed differently among the ancient trees. The moss and lichen absorbed excess sound, the call of birds made distant by the height of the branches they bounced between. Fog always crept between the ferns, the thin streams snaking between the trunks whispering amongst themselves. Rotting leaves and rich soil warmed the body upon each inhale, life and death cycling as easily as air through her lungs.

She halted so abruptly that her shoes dug into the soft earth. Golden eyes flashed from the brush, sending her heart racing with a rabbit's fleet even as her body went rigid. She didn't doubt the predator's gaze was locked upon her long before she spotted the beast in turn. While her feet seemed to find every stray twig and crisp leaf, the aromas from her basket weaving their ways through the gnarled trees, the beast moved as lightly as a shadow. As much as she wished it would have struck before dread set in, the ending would be the same.

Unable to shun hard-learned habits, she set the basket down on a flat patch of moss. Scavengers would quickly find it, but she wouldn't be the one to scatter its contents. She unfastened the travel cloak her mother made for her and hung it on the waiting limb of a nearby tree. If anyone ever found it, there would be no doubt who it once belonged to. Grandmother frequently called the vivid color "slatternly", but never threw the garment into the fire as she threatened. Better for her to wear it and let everyone see exactly what she was.

And with those two tasks completed, she sat on the loamy ground, closing her eyes and exposing her throat.

"There's no need to tremble, child. These woods are my domain, and I grant you safe passage."

There was a strange cadence to the words: formal, dated. It brought to mind the flutish tones of girls on the cusp of adolescence, childish lips giving way to speaking of the world as their mothers and elder sisters did. When she dared face the stranger in front of her, there was only a wolf peering at her with those same golden eyes. Compared to the great wolves she'd seen hunters brag about skinning, this one was hardly larger than the dogs minding the sheep.

Only she could seek out a mindless animal and instead find some sort of fae. Earning the ire of such old magic was a grim fate, even compared to arriving at Grandmother's past the expected time.

"Thank you, but the thought of being eaten by you or your kin isn't what frightens me."

The wolf tilted its head. "The only thing at the end of this path is the old woodcutter's cottage where the witch lives."

"She isn't a witch." Was the only thing she could think to reply with.

"You're right, witches are usually helpful. That old woman is merely a spiteful crone." The wolf sat back on its haunches, ready to wait for her to find her rationale. "Again, I ask you why you're so set on this path when nothing good lies at the end of it."

"That spiteful crone is Grandmother."

A long moment passed, the wolf almost seeming to nod at the unpleasant twist the conversation had taken, muzzle creasing in distaste.

"So that's why you'd rather take the perilous route through the woods than the shortcut along the road. Now that I think about it, I recall seeing your red cloak from afar. Equally, I remember the smell of blood and tears as you left the cottage."

Her face burned, eyes prickling. As long as nobody else acknowledged it, she could ignore the throbbing welts across her back, the metallic taste that wouldn't leave her mouth. She quit letting her mother tend to her wounds as soon as she learned to dress them herself. Her mother knew exactly what happened at the old woodcutter's cottage, but that didn't mean she had to be forced to stare at the outcome, her matching scars echoing their ache.

"Your grandmother possesses a cruelty even the most voracious monster could never match. I see not why you continue to bring her food, chop firewood, draw water from the river, and perform other such kindnesses she hasn't earned."

"If I don't care for her, nobody else will. My mother can't make the journey any longer."

"And how many journeys to the cottage do you think your own daughter will make until she drifts off the road and into the woods?" the wolf replied, neither tender, nor harsh.

Her breath hitched against the sobs she forced down, eyes furiously blinking away the beading moisture. If she lost control of herself now, she

wouldn't be able to stop. The wolf approached her, butting its head against her shoulder, cold nose tickling her neck. She wrapped her arms around its solid frame, fingers sinking into coarse fur. How strange it was to be embracing a wolf as the moon began its climb overhead, owls calling out as even the last creatures to seek shelter for the night were drifting away into their dreams. She was due at the cottage hours ago, Grandmother's fury over the tardiness likely eclipsed by the raging notion she would be left without fresh rations for several days, the time in which her courier was expected home and would be missed.

"Better me than anyone else," she murmured, the words having been repeated to the point where they no longer held any meaning.

"Why is that?"

"I share her blood."

The wolf huffed. "I see not how that matters. Bitterness will keep her alive long after you and the rest of your bloodline are gone. There will always be somebody else given to her."

"Then what choice is there?"

"There is always a choice, child. You found one when you left the path this evening. I present to you a different one. She will steal the very life from you as she did your mother before you if you allow it, just as she will until the end of time."

"But Grandmother isn't a witch. She has to die eventually."

"Of course," the wolf replied. "And then someone else will take her place. There will always be hags and incubi and all manners of monsters both real and fictitious. In turn, there must always be guardians. That cottage holds a long and abominable history. Whatever comes to take your grandmother's place will thirst for the same sacrifices. No one can ever stop wickedness as a whole, but they can burn away the tendrils it reaches out with before it ensnares innocents."

The realization of what the wolf was implying made her breath leave her like a hiss of steam, water thrown over barely kindled embers.

"I don't have the strength or courage to do what you're suggesting."

"Perhaps not, but you can obtain it." The wolf turned its large head towards where she left her cloak and provisions. "Take the knife from your basket and cut away my skin, then your own. I will don yours, and you mine. You will lack neither strength nor courage when you are armored with a thick coat and wield pointed teeth. There will be nothing stopping you from cleansing the woodcutter's cottage and leaving even the most vile of things hesitant to claim it."

"And what then?"

"These woods aren't cursed. They readily nourish those who care for it in turn. Follow the path of the wolf and learn to see the beauty in the world again."

In time, when you have healed, you will put on a human skin once again and return to what you left behind. That is what I did and will do.”

“What is your story?”

“One not too different from yours, child. When my father remarried, his new wife had no desire to compete for his attention with another woman, even if said woman was but a child. He told my elder brother to leave me in the heart of these woods. By the time I realized what was happening, he’d left me and picked up the trail of stones he made so I couldn’t follow him home. The wolf I met in these woods was a young woman who fled for her life when she found a room of blood and corpses her husband locked away. She licked the tears from my face and assured me the woods would never turn away from me as my kin had, would shelter me for as long as I needed as I learned to carry the hurt dealt to me.”

“So I’m to rip my grandmother apart with teeth and claws.”

“How you use your new form is up to you. My predecessor howled until the stone of her husband’s castle came crashing down, entombing him with the women he was so desperate to possess. I brought the horror of the woods to dog my family’s every step. My brother spent his life repenting his sins in the clergy. My father took his ax to the woman who poisoned his mind against his own child, and then a rope to himself for allowing the festering to consume his family. The only regret I have is not letting the forest take the cottage. How you decide to repay the debts your grandmother has forced is your choice.”

She stood, dusting the debris from her stockings and skirts, and retrieved the knife from the basket.

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Even before she felt the way the breeze ruffled her fur, how her center of gravity shifted to accommodate four sturdy legs, massive maw, and a bushy tail, she knew there had been a change. Several colors she knew tinted the leaves and fat berries bushes were now muddy shades of brown and gray. More surprising was how sharply she could see the woods around her given how brightly the stars still shone against the black velvet sky. The instinctive knowledge from the musk in the air that a rabbit warren lay buried nearby set her nose twitching, saliva flooding her mouth. Boughs creaked, vermin scurried through the underbrush, and other night creatures rose to begin their rounds.

Despite how far she’d wandered from the trail when she still walked on two legs, there was no difficulty in reorienting herself. She caught the scent of the cottage’s wood stove and aging flesh, loping between the trees with unmatched endurance and swiftness, cloak a streaming banner held between clenched teeth. Her hackles stood on end as the trees thinned, giving way to a clearing. A few tattered ribbons swayed from the boughs, wards to keep the

evil eye contained or proof some daring youth dared creep so close to the maligned cottage.

In another's hands, the cottage might have been a charming thing. It was only one room, a bed in one corner and a table, stove, and cabinet in the others. There weren't any colorful baubles, or even a simple jar of flowers to lessen the austerity. The bed wasn't any more comfortable than the floor, though it was slightly warmer underneath the scratchy blankets. Stone walls sagged in random directions, the thatching on the roof rotting at the edges. The jagged teeth of the fence enclosed it all, weeds peppering the dusty ground. If any joy went into the building of the cottage, it fled soon afterward.

It took her a long moment to remember how to use her human voice, but it rang through her ears just as it had in her old body. "Grandmother!"

Behind the cottage walls, the chair groaned. Stockinged feet scraped against the rough floorboards until Grandmother found her wooden shoes, then the rod kept in the corner. The door barked against the end of its hinges as Grandmother stormed out to drag her inside and beat an explanation for her tardiness out of her, letting the welts rise so the next strikes would sting more. They didn't end until the rod broke or Grandmother's bones ached too much to continue.

But all Grandmother saw in the clearing before the cottage was a wolf hardly out of its whelp phase, a wadded-up cloak at its feet. The brilliant color of the cloak was now lost to the wolf, but not Grandmother. She looked between the cloak and the wolf, expression cycling between confusion, realization, and finally, fear.

She was no longer some quivering girl for Grandmother to savage, but a creature capable of destruction in her own right. A victim could be trusted to remain meek, docile. An opponent would assure only one of them would leave the cottage. The rod couldn't hurt her any longer, about as useful against a wolf as tickling it. If she possessed any final hesitations, they were obliterated when Grandmother's eyes turned to the poker and its twin points beside the fireplace.

All the muscles in her new body bunched and sprang as she leapt. The momentum knocked Grandmother back like an oncoming wave, nails tearing weeping holes in her nightgown as her spectacles went skittering across the floor. Breathless, Grandmother kicked and gauged at her newly lupine face with withered talons. Raw, animal rage that had been left to simmer finally boiled over. No one would scar this beautiful new skin of hers. Certainly not scar her and live, and they both knew it.

"I—"

Whatever curse Grandmother was preparing to spew at her was drowned out in a gurgle, blood arcing through the air as her throat was torn out between the wolf's righteous jaws. When the sputtering gasps halted, the wolf sat back, using her tongue to clean away the gore spattered over her silver

coat, letting it slip down her throat like the sweetest of wine. Once finished, she lifted her head to the night sky and sang.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Oliver Fosten is a genderqueer, Pacific Northwest-born, NYU-educated monster enthusiast. When they aren't writing, they can be found making candles, playing video games, or with a cat on their lap. For more queered content both fresh and familiar, follow them on social media.

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Baba Yaga

POETRY BY ALORAH WELTI

It is a disgusting business,
being a witch.
But I am not ashamed.
I laugh at those afraid of
bloody, stinky, dirty death.

It is a disgusting business,
but there is something sickly sweet
in the taste of spoiled wine,
in the smell of dog shit.
Like a secret in a rotten box,
like offering moldy bread to a hag goddess.

For I know of puss,
of spit, of the skin
hanging from the roof of your mouth.
I know of it and I accept it.
I have made bedmates of foulness
and disgust,
for I have yet to know power without
removing a couple of chickens
from their heads.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Alorah Welti (she/her) is a nineteen-year-old Minnesota-born feminist, synesthete, second-generation pagan witch, and emerging poet and artist. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Allium*, *Inklette*, *Cutbow Quarterly*, *The Origami Review*, and elsewhere. She is a recipient of the Daniel Manacher Prize for Young Artists through the Sandisfield Arts Center. She lives on stolen Mohican and Wabanaki land, just north of North Adams, Massachusetts, with her family.

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Swamp Magic

ARTWORK AND COMMENTARY BY JESSE GABRIEL

Swamp magic isn't done in the incantations of traditional magic. It isn't something taught from books or in dusty candlelight. It isn't held behind ceremony and formality.

It's in the bones, in the blood, in the way a storm rolls in, the way the air smells as a storm rolls in, the way the sugarcane ashes taste in the back of your throat, in water and wind collected from the hurricanes that would destroy us.

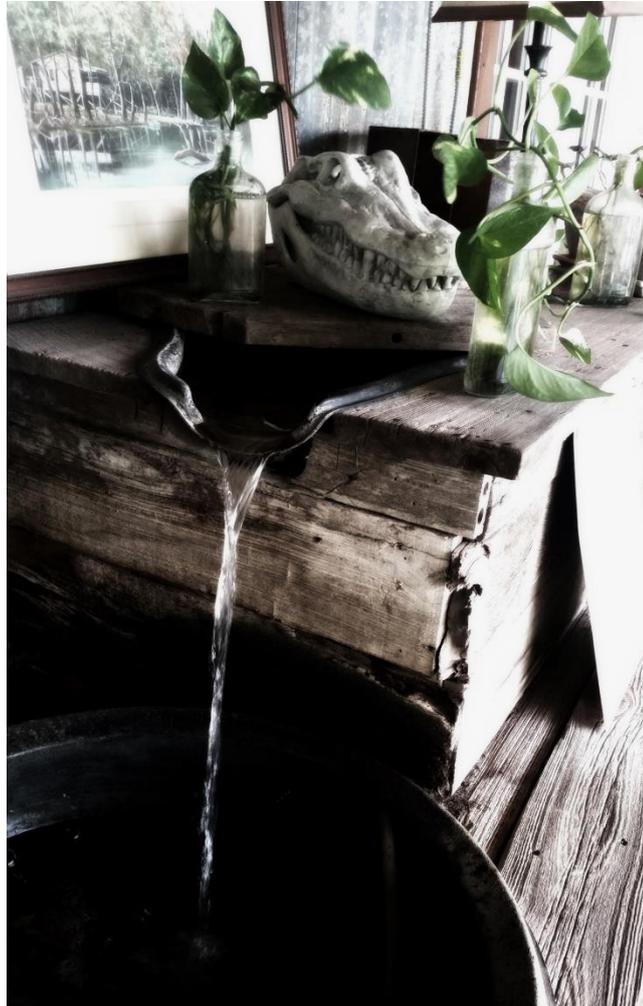
It's your Maw Maw's prayers late at night when you're sick, the way her pies never quite taste right made by anyone but her. It's in the wood your Paw Paw works, woven in cane and straw into chairs and brooms.

It's in candles, in the bottle of holy water in a kitchen cabinet. It's in woven palm crosses and saint candles and icons and catfish dinners in church parking lots.

Even deeper, it's in whispered words, in the Gift, in weathered old hands laid on the sick, in offerings of chicken and bones and teeth and flowers left at the feet of old oaks and saints alike.

Swamp magic feels like the ageless bayous, like the cypress and oak, standing firm through a hurricane, rooted deep in old soil. It smells of tannin-rich water, an untouchable medicinal tea made of fallen leaves in muddy water, steeped in sunlight. It feels like air so humid you could cut it with a knife, still and heavy, like holding your breath while you pass a cemetery. It tastes like honeysuckle and the thick scent of gardenias, cloying and sticky-sweet.

Swamp magic lives in the dirt that stains your church pants, in the standing water of the swamp, in the blinding summer sun, in the breeze of a porch fan.



ABOUT THE ARTIST: Jesse Gabriel is a queer writer and photographer from South Louisiana, with an academic background in literature and creative writing. Horror and queer literature are their favorite genres, and they draw from their own experiences for much of their writing. They enjoy exploring the outdoors, and draw inspiration from their surroundings, especially abandoned and decaying structures, and the history of the area they live in.

Christabel Revisited

Based on Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Christabel"

POETRY BY LINDSAY PELLICCIA

Part I

The Lovely Lady Christabel
Whom her father loves so well,
It was midnight within the wood
Far beyond where the old gate stood
She kneeled below the large oak tree
And in silence prayeth she.

Her ringlet curls rested upon her head
As if she were fast asleep in bed
The wind was weak on this warm night
A lone red leaf danced with all its might.
Sweet Christabel, why are you here?
Alone in this silent wood with no one near.

The far-off bell doth toll
Christabel counted the time she hath stole
She rested her head within her fair hands
But she still refused to stand.
A noise close by doth make itself known
Christabel sensed she was not alone.

Hush, beating heart of Christabel!
What do you hear beyond this dell?
She folded her arms beneath her cloak,
And stole to the other side of the oak.
There she saw a figure in white
Dressed in a robe that doth shined bright.

Oh, sweet Christabel do not draw near!
For this figure is still unclear!
A woman with her hair undone
Approached Christabel with gentle abandon.
Gems gleaned from upon her head
Words still remained unsaid.

Her arms were long and bare.

Christabel did not falter in her stare.
She grasped her chest as if under a spell.
What was happening to dear Christabel?
Was this figure of a magic way?
Or did Christabel need to keep her fears at bay?

The figure then made answer meet,
And her voice was faint and sweet:—
Please take pity on me!
For I have faced horrors you should never see!
My name is Geraldine
And now I must describe this scene.

Five warriors seized me yestermorn,
From my life, I was brutally torn.
They took me away on their steeds of white
How I wish no one this plight!
I was left alone within this wood
And found I'd suffered all I could.

I now plead with you dear maid
That you can provide me aid.
Christabel then stretched forth her hand,
To prove that she did indeed understand.
Fair Geraldine I am Christabel, spoke she
And safe I will make sure you will be.

Your story you surely must tell
For that will make all of this well.
My father will send for your home
For you must no longer roam!
Dear Geraldine come away with me
Far from this wretched tree!

Geraldine took the sweet Christabel's hand
And they crossed a wide breadth of land.
When they reached the gate
Weak, Geraldine doth sank.
And Christabel with might and main
Lifted her up to relieve her pain.

They crossed the threshold as a pair
And Christabel handled Geraldine with care.

How beautiful was she
Christabel could not help but see.
Her face was of a bright white
And her hair shone in the moon's light.

Once within the castle's walls
They passed through its many halls.
When they reached Christabel's chamber door
Geraldine understood she must worry no more.
For Christabel was close by
And the moon was high in the night sky.

They entered the room with much haste
For they needed to escape all they had just faced.
Christabel put down Geraldine in the dark room
And each secretly hoped the sun would not rise soon.
The light from a lamp flickered upon the wall
And Geraldine's head did fall.

Her face was of a ghostly pallor
And her Christabel rushed over with much valor
O weary lady, Geraldine,
Please rest after all you have seen!
Take my bed or this chair, spoke Christabel
For you must treat yourself well!

How fortunate I am to have found you, fair maid
Spoke Geraldine as she gazed upon Christabel unafraid.
Christabel's heart doth quickened
For she found herself with Geraldine's beauty stricken.
Geraldine's hair shone wildly beneath the room's faint light.
She was an ethereal sight.

Christabel clutched her chest once more
For she felt she was under a spell quite like before.
What power overtook sweet Christabel?
Did it come with the sound of a far-off knell?
Did Geraldine put her in this trance?
Christabel doth looked askance.

Christabel, what plagues thee?
Asks Geraldine. What can I not see?
Christabel looked up to meet her gaze

Her hand she did raise.
She placed her hand on Geraldine's cheek
For she found she no longer felt meek.

Christabel now understood
That what she felt within the wood
And what she felt within this room
Was not a spell or trance that foretold near doom
But something true and sweet.
Geraldine's lips did Christabel meet.

Geraldine closed her eyes
Feelings of love had begun to arise.
Sweet Geraldine, spoke Christabel
I wish to know you well
Let us rest here for the night
And we shall leave when you have gained your might.

I wish to be with you beyond these walls
Here my father rules these halls.
He will not understand our bond
He will not understand why you to me are so fond.
Dearest Geraldine, I love you so!
Of this, you must know!

Fair Christabel, spoke Geraldine
Our love will remain evergreen!
For I love you beyond this plane
Without you, I will feel much pain.
The pair gazed upon each other
They never wished to be parted from one another.

The moon was dim within their room
But their love was without a hint of gloom
They lay within Christabel's bed
They loved each other without any words said.
How true this love doth be
Each maiden finally was free.

Part II

Come the morn the pair awoke
Christabel doth spoke.

Loveliest Geraldine
With you, heaven I have seen
Before the sun preys on us both
We must take this oath.

Dearest Geraldine, please swear
That this life we will share.
Geraldine gazed upon her maiden sweet
And spoke when their eyes did meet.
Christabel our love shall last forevermore
Far longer than any I have felt before

For you, I would face any feat
Any challenge I would surely meet.
Now we must get away
Before the sun rises for the day.
Christabel smiled as she listened to Geraldine
For this was the happiest she had ever been.

The pair walked through the dark halls
Moving quietly through the castle's sprawls.
Passing the dreary niche with shield of Leoline
Christabel shuttered from forces unseen.
What haunts you, Christabel?
Is it your father whom you love so well?

His presence crawled along the walls
Christabel was sure she had heard his spectral image call.
Dearest Geraldine whispered the maid
I am feeling most afraid.
Geraldine with might and pride
Looked at Christabel and replied.

Good maid Christabel forget your father and this place
And with our love we will replace.
Now tread lightly past Leoline's door
And we can start our life as we swore.
They crept along the unlit path
Until they heard the mastiff's wrath.

The dog it shook the castle's fort
With its forceful call, it was sure to soon rouse the court.
The mastiff shouted with the hour

The clock chimed from the tower.
Sweet Christabel, how could you forget?
With the sounds of the clock, your fate is set!

Geraldine, there is no time to waste, spoke Christabel.
My father and the court will find us and our story I simply can't sell
As they spoke a door opened nearby
Sir Leoline appeared and Christabel let out a cry
My daughter, what are you doing at this hour? Spoke Leoline.
Who is this woman? What is this scene?

Father, I am sorry to have awoken you
I am helping fair Geraldine who has seen horrors known to few
Geraldine lifted her head, her stately neck apparent
Leoline saw her beauty was inherent.
How awful must it have been
For lovely Geraldine!

Great Baron Leoline
Excuse your daughter for this scene
It is I who disrupted these halls
You see I was harmed and no one heard my calls.
Yet, fair Christabel she took me in
Please believe me she has not committed any sin.

Leoline looked at Christabel
Whom he loved so well
He saw her face so deeply pained
And felt his heart much strained
He remembered his time before her mother
When he was indebted to another.

Christabel, spoke Leoline
I understand your pain and will not intervene
Christabel's fair visage shifted
How her spirits had lifted!
Father, who do you speak of? Asked she.
Leoline sighed and in his child himself he did see.

Long ago, my child, I had known a man
And a love between us began.
But our kinship caused us much pain
For this affair, I myself had slain.

I did wrong by my dearest friend
Because I knew how our story would end.

Christabel crossed the hall
And to her father, she did call.
Oh Father, how I love you so
But from this place, we must go
We cannot let our tale mimic your fate
For my love for Geraldine is great.

Please do not look ill upon my choice
Leoline spoke with a soft voice.
His eyes fixed on his daughter dear
Go away from here
Do not return until the land
Can learn to understand

There is change on the horizon I wist
But until then you must persist.
He drew his daughter close to him
For he knew that her future could be grim
Though Christabel's face so lovely and so bright
Assured him that everything would one day be right.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Lindsay Pelliccia is a Senior English major at Temple University and the founder of *Contemporary Jo Literary Magazine*.

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Baths are Less Magical as a Grown Up

POETRY BY GABBY GILLIAM

Once as the tub filled with water
and I submerged to surround

myself with the faucet's steady
thunder I imagined myself

a mermaid—my own
private ocean without tides

filtered and chlorinated
to make it safe to bathe in.

Thirty years later this ocean
feels cramped, knees rise above

the surface—fleshy monoliths
coarse with stubble

small mounds of breast
exposed to the air

and I feel less a mermaid
and more a canned tuna

a porpoise trapped
in a porcelain net.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Gabby Gilliam lives in the DC metro area with her husband and son. Her poetry has most recently appeared in *Tofu Ink*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, *Pure Slush*, *Deep Overstock*, *Vermillion*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, and *Equinox*. You can find her online at gabbygilliam.squarespace.com or on Facebook at facebook.com/GabbyGilliamAuthor.

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Instagram: @pixxiepoetess

Honey Jar

POETRY BY STEPHANIE M. WYTOVICH

A tablespoon of molasses slides
down my throat, then a bay leaf,
a sprig of rosemary. I light
a candle on my tongue, swallow
melted wax and flames, my teeth
honey bit and sugar spun, my mouth
a witch, a cavern of candied words.

I carve your name into my lips,
eat the letters you sent, your spit
still wet on the envelopes; you
charge what's inside of me, my
stomach a jar, a pit, a shaken vial,
this shared spell, a hornet's nest,
the death wish of a bee's sting.

Every second you sleep, I bite
the wings off singing cicadas,
dig out the thorns imbedded in
my palms, my heart line severed,
a dried-up well, a jaundiced rose
I wilt, my silhouette leaded,
kissed by morning's fog.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Stephanie M. Wytovich is an American poet, novelist, and essayist. Her Bram Stoker award-winning poetry collection, "Brothel", earned a home with *Raw Dog Screaming Press* alongside "Hysteria: A Collection of Madness", "Mourning Jewelry", "An Exorcism of Angels", "Sheet Music to My Acoustic Nightmare", and most recently "The Apocalyptic Mannequin". Her debut novel, "The Eighth", is published with *Dark Regions Press*. You can also find her essays, nonfiction, and class offerings on *LitReactor*. Follow Wytovich at <http://stephaniewytovich.blogspot.com/>

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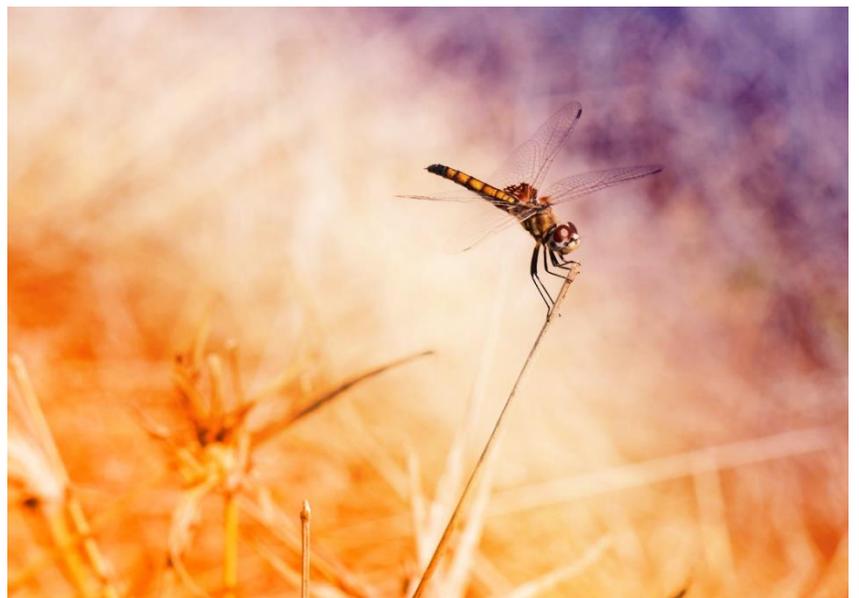
Scrim & Amber & Grounded

ARTWORKS BY MELISSA NUNEZ



ABOUT THE ARTIST: Melissa Nunez lives and creates in the caffeinated spaces between awake and dreaming. She makes her home in the Rio Grande Valley region of South Texas, where she enjoys observing, exploring, and photographing the local flora and fauna with her three home-schooled children. She is contributor for *The Daily Drunk Mag* and *Yellow Arrow*, and staff writer for *Alebrijes Review*.

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The Magic of the Powerless

CREATIVE NONFICTION BY LAUREN ORTEGO

When I was a little girl, I would cast spells. I thought, at first, that I was praying.

Prayer didn't make much sense to me no matter how hard I looked at it. You ask for something really hard, something that you really want, and it happens. Maybe you get down on your knees, maybe you do it in a church surrounded by stained glass and statues that are looking but not seeing, maybe you squeeze your eyes shut hard and whisper it to yourself again and again. Whichever way grabs your fancy, the short of it is that you ask God(s) for something and you get it.

If you're a good person.

I was always afraid that I wasn't a good person. It's a fear that follows me even now. So, just in case God(s) didn't deem me worthy of my request, I would take some extra precautions and put matters into my own hands. Me, my younger sister, and our friend from down the block who just so happened to be of an age nestled neatly in-between my sister and I's three-year gap, would gather around our front yards and begin our search for ingredients.

Ingredients for what? you may be asking. Last time you checked, prayers don't require ingredients of a physical form. Ingredients for potions. Obviously.

We grabbed anything but not everything. Using a discerning eye, we'd pick up the needles from the pine tree in my front yard, particularly long blades of grass, a fancy looking flower from the neighbors' bushes, a piece of wood that was too thin and also too short to be considered a stick, and anything else of interest.

We hunted for what felt like hours, but was more than likely a few minutes, and gathered in a small huddle to put our findings in a bucket. Where that bucket came from, I'll never know. I don't remember fetching it and I don't remember ever caring to wonder. It was always just... there.

Once together in the bucket, we mixed the ingredients with a larger stick used as a sort of makeshift mortar and watched our collection get crushed and squished. Once the mixture was complete, which was always up to the mixer themselves, we separated it into individual bowls made of big leaves or just used our palms. From there, we'd each have our own portion, cupping the strange, watery gloop in our hands like small children waiting for more soup.

This liquid, for it was mostly a liquid now that it had been thoroughly pulverized by our hard work, could do and be anything. Drinking it could bring you superpowers, throwing it on someone could burn their skin, washing your hair with it could make you blonde – the possibilities were as endless as they were ridiculous.

We knew somewhere deep down that our mothers would not approve of drinking it, so we often settled for throwing it at each other or simply playing

with it until it was time to go inside. But I sometimes used it to pray or to grant myself wishes or to cast spells.

It felt magical to create and brew this hodge-podge of ingredients. We were creating something from nothing and even though that “something” was a weird brown mixture that wouldn’t pass for anything other than sludge from the bottom of a river, it was still something that it wasn’t before.

I would dump it onto the base of the old pine tree out front and ask for my crush to like me back, for my hair to not be so frizzy, or for my stomach to be smaller. I wished for these things and hoped that because they weren’t impossible they would come true. That pine tree was always looming over me, the air around its base cooler than the rest of the yard.

I wasn’t thinking of God when I performed this ritual. I was thinking of anyone who could hear me.

I would add flowers for something sweet, like asking for my grandma to stay healthy. I added more pine needles when I asked for that girl who made fun of my friend to wake up with pimples. More grass was added in when I wanted a lost dog to be found.

Curses, wishes, prayers, potions, spells, magic – all of it was at my fingertips. I had never felt so powerful. I had never felt so weak. If I was strong, I wouldn’t need to consult a sick soup of twigs and our neighbors’ hyacinths. I would be able to enact my wishes through sheer force of will or by taking action myself. I was not strong.

My spells never worked, not even when I added extra dandelions or a particularly shiny rock. And I knew in the grand scheme of things that it was all just pretend. Magic isn’t real anyways.

But when you feel stripped of your own power, the rawness where it was once nestled stinging with afterburn, borrowing a new form of power from an unknown entity that lives in a puddle potion that you made out of leaves and dirt might help. Because one day, you won’t need the dirt and the grass and the leaves.

One day, you’ll be able to perform magic all on your own just by being strong.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Lauren Ortego is a new writer making the transition from journalism to creative writing. She loves adding books to her TBR, purchasing them to add to her shelf, and then not touching them for another three to five business months. Lover of commas, parentheses, and writing in a style of prose that would make her college English professor sick, Lauren is currently on a journey to rediscover her love of writing. She can be found on Twitter posting selfies once a week and on Instagram posting memes once a month, if you’re into that sort of chaotic internet presence.

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A Witch Comes to Call

FICTION BY AMANDA LONG

What must one do when they find themselves moved into a house that is haunted by dark magic?

Why, call Caro Dunne of course.

Lord Benjamin Alfred heard her name in passing, his interest piqued by the acknowledgement of a powerful witch in the city. But most of all, he found himself slipping into the conversation he overheard when it was said Caro Dunne was a witch who paid house calls to help expel unwanted magic that lingered long after the last family.

He inquired through the people he was told about, and he received a card slipped through his mailbox one morning with a single cursive hand giving a date. He assumed it was the witch answering him, so he prepared the children and the house as best as he could, in hopes she would manage to find the source of the dark magic and sweep it out with a broom.

Benjamin had moved his three young children into this house months after the death of his wife, in hopes it would help them with their grief. He found himself glancing around doorways, wondering when Angelica would come through the entryway with a loud laugh on her red lips. Maybe it was more for him than the children that he moved them to the edge of the city, but he hoped it would stop their cries in the middle of the night.

There was a prompt knock on the hour as the grandfather clock chimed from the corner, and before his butler could hurry forward the door burst open. It flew so fast it slammed hard into the wall behind it. A gust of wind blew through like a storm, kicking up dead leaves from the ground and sending them flying through the air like snowflakes. The figure of a woman stepped inside, holding down her skirts that reached her knees, another hand atop her hat that curved around her head in the latest style.

She let out a laugh as she waltzed in, her Northern accent thick and heavy as she muttered, "Sorry about that! I didn't think I would let the wind in! Nearly blew me away." The door slammed shut behind her, shutting off the screech of the wind, a kind of silence that ached after the flurry of commotion.

Benjamin blinked, eyeing the woman before him. She was short and slight, bony instead of curvy. She wore stockings on her legs, tucked into wide heels. Her dress was a pale creamy rose, reaching to her knees and long sleeves to her wrists. The hat matched but was more of a lilac tint. Chin-length blonde hair and large hazel eyes, somehow both intimidating and gentle, peeked out from beneath.

The witch brushed off some leaves from her dress and then clicked her heels together, one hand grasping the small purse at her hips. "You must be Benjamin Alfred?" With a swallow, he nodded. She beamed. "Miss Caroline Dunne, at your service!" A shiver ran over her, almost comically, and she

glanced around the room. “Boy, you weren’t kidding. This place *reeks* of dark magic.”

Benjamin cleared his throat, a little perplexed by the woman who seemed to speak every little thing that crossed her mind. He found it both unnerving and charming. “Yes. Miss Dunne. These are two of my children, Lily and Harry.” His daughter, the middle child at ten, stood solemnly at his side, nearly hiding behind his legs. Harry, the eldest at thirteen, gazed at Caro Dunne as if she were the most enchanting thing he had ever seen.

Caro pursed her lips, flicking her eyes up to the father’s. “I thought you had three children?”

“Freddie is in his room. He isn’t feeling well.”

She nodded, her heels clicking against the tiled floor. Her eyes skimmed over the whole room, detailing every little thing. She gave a low whistle. *What a mansion.*

“Would you like a tour of the house?”

She waved a hand. “I’ll take a walk on my own. I can better concentrate on my magic that way.” But she spun in his direction, noticing how the children looked at her in such strange ways. Caro was used to the attention, the awe and distrust typical in people’s faces. Magic and witches weren’t uncommon, but someone of her nature was. Witches tended to keep to themselves, letting people come to them for odds and ends. Caro liked people, liked helping them, so she became a kind of exorcist for houses with remnants of magic that festered and bled over time. “First, explain to me again what happens in this house.”

The lord of the house sighed. The two children at each of his sides flinched. “The house seems to react to us in bad ways. The children constantly have horrid nightmares.” He gently touched his daughter’s shoulder, her pale eyes closed tightly. “It throws things at us. It once tossed Harry from a chair at dinner. It’s like... it is angry we are here.”

Caro sighed, readjusting her hat as she felt it slipping awkwardly over her hair. “Most often, houses respond with the magic left behind. Do you know anything about the previous owners?” Benjamin shook his head. “It’s always possible the family that lived here before had magic, but they were unhappy. Many people don’t realize that magic, whether good or bad, has an energy, typically responding to the elements around them. In cases, if husbands and wives fought often, their words turn into shards of power and dig their way into the walls, left behind long after they leave. Magic lingers.”

His brows furrowed as he touched the arms of both of his children. “Will you be able to get rid of it?”

Caro glanced over her shoulder, flashing him a wide smile. “I’ve never had a house fight back, that’s for sure.”

Without another word, she took off to explore the house. It was big, but not the most extravagant one she had ever been in. It was covered in furniture and paintings and photographs, with mirrors hanging on nearly every surface. Clocks clicked and whirred, and she found the sound comforting. It reminded

her of her father's shop, where she would spend hours looking into the ticks of clockwork.

She left her purse at the front of the house, and now that both hands were free, she flexed them. The magic touched her palms, pressing into them, as if in warning that it was *upset*. Caro frowned as she felt the way it pushed against her, wanting her to return through those front doors. Though she had told Benjamin Alfred houses hadn't fought back, that didn't mean she hadn't felt the hesitancy from the walls. A house was like a person: once they were solid in their ways, they didn't wish to change. And magic hiding in wooden beams of a house was the worst of all.

First, she had to find the source of where the energy bled from. There was always a heart that beat out the blood of this dark magic. Sometimes, it was a bedroom, like an old woman's house she had once met. Turned out, it was left over from her husband's death five years prior, and she learned they had fought ruthlessly. Other times, it was a place where someone had died, and the last of their magic poured into the only place it could go. Why houses were a prime spot for enchantment to seep into, she didn't know, but she found herself called again and again to take the darkness and toss it from the windows.

Closing her eyes, she felt the power tingle against her. It pulled on the edge of her ear, and there was a low whimper. Her lids flickered open, surprised to hear a sound accompanying the magic that wanted to hide away from her. Usually taste or smell, and occasionally sight, came with the dark magic hanging from the ceiling of houses, but she had never encountered one with sound.

It felt like an echo beating into the side of her head, her own power trying to tell her something, give her a clue. With a huff, she headed up the stairs, sliding down the halls, letting the dark power lead her through the house.

The pulse of the magic beat against the floorboards, a *thump-thump-thump* pumping with the power that threatened and hurt the people living in this house. Rubbing her temples, she followed, the siren song of this house straining against her blood. It anchored her, rooting her into these halls until all she felt was its rotting spirit slithering up her spine.

"C'mon, c'mon," Caro murmured toward the empty, quiet halls. "I know you're here, you know I'm here. You can't hide forever and might as well give yourself up before I get annoyed."

Her feet sunk into the carpet. As she took a deep breath, she watched as a mirror shuddered against the wall and then flew off, barreling toward her. She ducked, holding up her hands so her own power wrapped around the mirror and tilted it upward, so it soared over her. With a huff, she stood up, glaring down the hall. "There's no reason to be rude."

The heartbeat of the house thumped harder the farther she walked down that hall; she could feel it vibrating in her chest. She took a hand and let the tips of her fingers slide along the wall. The thrum was in the walls, trying to skirt away from her, but she had already tasted it. Now, she was chasing it.

“Come out, come out, wherever you are,” she whispered as she felt a shriek in her head, yanking on her neck.

When the headaches came, she knew she was close. But this one was *strong*. She stopped in her tracks, wrapping her fingers over the top of her head, grinding her teeth together as a couple of tears threatened to leak from her eyes.

Prying her fingers off her hat, she forced herself forward, the hum turning into a chaotic beat against the door just before her. She glared at the simple wooden door and with her own magic, made the doorknob turn and shoved it open. Waltzing inside, she found the last thing she had been expecting.

It was a dark room. The curtains were mostly drawn shut, a messy bed only noticeable from the white sheets. And in the corner, near the windows with little bits of sunlight, was a young boy curled with his knees under his chin, shaking as he stared up at her with wide pale eyes.

Caro exhaled, realizing something. As she sucked in her own magic, tucking it back into herself, she felt the dark magic from the house bombard her, heaviness weighing down on her shoulders, chest, head. The darkness was alive in this room, pounding like a frightened heart.

And it was all coming from the boy.

“Freddie?” Caro asked, her voice sweet, charming, careful.

He shook a little harder, swallowed. “You’re the witch, aren’t you? The one Father called?”

The boy couldn’t have been more than eight, his voice prim and proper, expected from a son of a lord, with his nannies and tutors and parents. His voice was still a little high, typical for a boy his age.

But the longer she stared at him, the more she realized he was scared. No, not quite—he was *terrified*.

With a breath, she flashed her widest smile and walked toward him. She scooted him over a little with a flick of her power, and then she lowered herself to the ground. With her legs stretched out and her back against the wall, she brought herself down to his level so she wasn’t a tall, long-legged witch with magic spilling out of her. Now, she was a woman sitting beside a boy in the dark room.

“I am,” she replied, polite. “You can call me Caro.”

His eyes still sparked with fear, and his lips pressed together, unsure of her, skeptical. The sight of that expression on a small boy made her want to laugh.

“Does your father know you have this magic?”

Freddie snapped his head away, peering down into his lap. His legs fell from their bent position, and he crossed them together. His fingers dug at one another, a nervous tick she realized. “I don’t think so.”

“Neither do I,” she said, tilting her head back against the wall. “He believes it’s remnants from this house.” Instead, it was dark magic pouring from his own boy. This was a new one for her—not the house at all, but a child.

Turning her head slightly, she caught the sight of the boy peering at her from out the corner of his eye. She felt the magic creep back, as if it took a step away from them. “Talk to me, Freddie. What’s going on?”

Freddie turned quickly, staring straight ahead. Caro noted he had a shoelace in his hand—where it came from, she hadn’t noticed—and he was twirling it over and over his arm. His brows creased together, mouth downturned at the edges. “I don’t want to be here.”

Caro raised a brow. “And why not?”

He snarled up at her, “Because this wasn’t Mother’s house.”

Caro felt her stomach drop. She recalled the little information Benjamin Alfred had given her when he sent a note, requesting her help. There was a passing comment about his wife dying seven months ago, and they had moved into this house a month before this.

This wasn’t simply a situation of a boy with magic.

It was a *grieving* boy with magic.

Caro took a deep breath. She crossed one leg over the other. The boy was staring up at her with a soft sneer in his face. Freddie wasn’t one who usually glared at people, she realized.

“This house doesn’t have any bit of her,” he spat, turning his angry gaze back toward the wall. “Back home, it did. It felt like some part of her was still there.” The heaviness of the magic in the house crashed over them, and Caro felt a little bit of a sweat on the back of her neck. His voice cracked a little over the next words, “I’m starting to forget what she looked like.”

Caro swallowed. Exhaled. “I lost both of my parents when I was young.”

The boy’s dark head snapped so fast in her direction. She was staring up at the ceiling, but she felt his eyes on her. “Really?”

She gave a nod. “I was fourteen when they died in an accident.” She waved her hands in the air. “I understand all this now, Freddie. It’s your emotions coming out.” Moving so she peered down at him, she gave him a small smile. “The night my parents died, I sent an ancient stone tower tumbling into a river.”

His eyes went wide, with awe or fear, she wasn’t sure. His throat bobbed as he glanced back down at his hands. “What happened?” His magic retreated a little.

Her brows furrowed. “What do you mean?”

“How...” his voice thickened. “How did you get over it?”

“Oh, you poor boy.” She gave a small laugh, patting one of his knees. “I didn’t get over it.”

Absolute terror spread across his face—eyes glazed, lips wobbled. “I have to live with this pain my whole life?”

“Certainly,” she replied honestly. “But it does get better.”

“That’s what everyone says,” he grumbled.

“I’m sure no one else knows what they’re talking about, right?” Caro pushed off the wall and slid around, facing the boy. “Let me tell you something, Freddie Alfred. Pain is a bloody nightmare. So is love. And that’s what you’re

suffering from, isn't it? Pain from love that has been ripped away from you?" When the boy tipped his head up, she saw the tears shining in his eyes. "But would you rather have anything else? You are reacting with anger and tears and heartache." She held out a hand, pointing a single finger against his chest. His gaze locked onto her, their eyes melting into one another. "But you are *loving*. Grieving your mother is perfectly normal. It will take time. You will go through too many emotions to count. But my god, you will come out of it with so much love in your heart that it will make the world a little brighter." She ruffled the top of his hair. "If there's anything your mother has left you, it's the love between you two."

The dark magic slipped away, sinking beneath the curtains, the bed, the desk in a corner. Caro watched as tears fell down the boy's face, dripping onto the floor. He was a little boy who was experiencing pain he had never known, shouldn't have known this early on, but she had a feeling he would do exactly what she had told him. He was only a child missing his mother and he would never stop, but there would be an ease, a calm when he thought of her. And that was how love worked, how it shined in the world—she remembered it in her mother and father's eyes, and she used those flicks of memories to ease her aches.

"Why are you helping me?" Freddie's voice rose as he gazed up at her, eyes and face red and tear-stained.

She smiled. "Long ago, a man helped me. I thought I would pass along the sentiment." She didn't tell him how the man had found her curled up beneath the pieces of that tower, in hopes they would crush her and kill her. She didn't tell him how the man had carried her home, fed her, clothed her, and told her a story of a young witch who had lost everything, and she used her love and power to heal and become so powerful that she became a god. She had no idea if the legend was true, as she never found a record of it when she passed through villages, but she had left the tale folded away into a piece of her heart, remembering the way the man's voice rumbled and the fireplace crackled as he told the story. That story came to her whenever she felt like she would crumble, to remind her that she could become a god, that she could save the world, even if it was a little boy who had dark magic haunting the halls of his new home.

Caro gave him a nod, a gentle tug on his sleeve and then she stood up. There wasn't much else to say to the boy, as she knew he would swim through his grief, and when he was ready, the dark magic of the house would subside entirely. Her heels clacked against the floor, leaving Freddie Alfred alone in his own darkness, covered in tears.

"Miss Caro?"

She peeked over her shoulder at him.

He sniffled. "You won't tell my father, will you?"

Grinning at him, she flicked a hand. "Not my secret to tell, dear." And then she waltzed out of the room, letting the doorknob click shut.

Already walking back through the halls, the air felt lighter, gentler. There were still flicks of darkness, creeping along the floorboards against the walls, hiding away in the corners. But there was some peace, some understanding in this house now.

She met Benjamin Alfred, alone in the entryway. Picking up her purse from the floor, she flashed him a smile.

He rubbed his cheek. “Has it been taken care of?”

Tipping her head to the side, she considered best how to explain it. “I got most of it out. There are still some claws in the house, but I promise they will move on with time.” She shivered, peering over the ceiling. “It’s typical of houses to hold onto memories for a while.”

The lord nodded, paying her handsomely, and thanked her.

As the front door shut behind her, Caro walked into the mist clinging to the air, letting the water seep into her skin, her clothes.

Behind her, she left a house grieving over death, but she had seen the little light slipping from between Freddie’s curtains. One day, he would throw open those windows, drowning out the darkness that lived inside of him.

But for now, he would love from the dark.

Sometimes, houses are haunted by dark magic. Sometimes, families are haunted by grief.

In any case, there is someone one can call. A witch with a strong sense of magic, an ability to move along walls and search for the way dark power clung to memories and homes and people.

If one must, they can call Caro Dunne.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Amanda Long is a writer from the Bay Area in California. She loves to write stories and tell tales, living in her own imagination. A graduate from San Jose State University, with a Bachelor’s in English Literature, she has found her deep love for stories. When she isn’t writing, she can be found reading, watching films and TV series, and enjoying time with friends, family, and co-workers. She has published a short story entitled “A Summer’s Spirit” in *The Raven Review*.

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My Mother's Hands Have Never Known Magic

POETRY BY CARLY CHANDLER

Hardship lines the gentle way my mother kneads the dough.
I sit across from her at the dining table that's always been ours,
and she says nothing as she dusts flour over the table, then her
rolling pin, thinning the dumpling dough down enough to satisfy
her mother before her. She smiles at me, wielding a butter knife,
cutting long, even strips of dough, and tasks me with stirring the pot
while she walks back and forth, back and forth, over and over again.
Filling the pot higher and higher with dumpling dough until I worry
that it will spill over, boiling broth popping and sizzling on our stove,
but my mother reassures me and tells me I'm doing a good job.
I stir the boiling broth and the dumpling dough, and my mother's
gentle hand strokes through my hair, pulling knots free,
and I don't have to ask where she learned to make this meal,
the one that keeps us warm and our bellies full in the middle of winter,
a special treat for when she wants us to have plenty,
and there is something in the broth, something that brings us back to life.
Something like magic, spilling over the sides of the pot when the broth doesn't.
My mother is certain, and we have plenty.

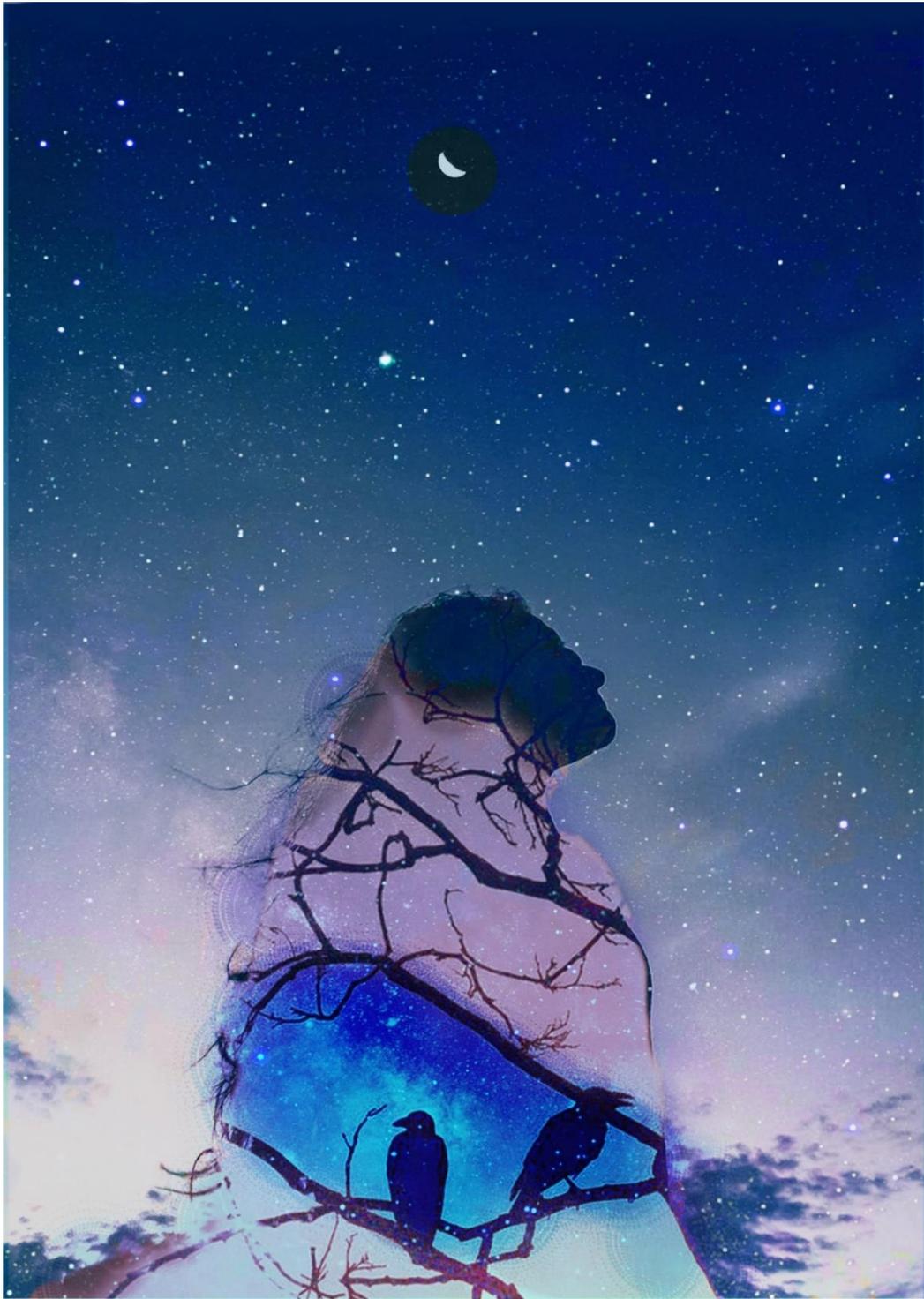
ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Carly Chandler (she/they) is an experimental queer author from Louisiana. They have previously been published in *Argus*, *Demonic Verses*, and *Words and Whispers Journal*. She enjoys writing horror, poetry, and horrific poetry. They are an MA student at Northwestern State University, where they received their BA in English and Creative Writing.

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Hecate

ARTWORK BY MIRJANA M.



ABOUT THE ARTIST: Mirjana M. are a digital artist and writer from Belgrade, Serbia. Their work focuses on exploring the juxtaposition of various elements through mixed media of photography, double exposure, textures, and light. Their work most often explores concepts of duality and has appeared in *Gulf Stream Literary*, *The Good Life Review*, *waxing & waning* magazines, and other places. You can see more of their work at their blog oloriemoonshadow.wordpress.com or at <https://ello.co/oloriel>. They are also the creator of *Suburban Witchcraft Magazine*.

Twitter: [@selena_oloriel](https://twitter.com/selena_oloriel)

The Current Lore

POETRY BY BEATRIZ SEELAENDER

When they buried him a tree grew from the same spot.

It ripened at spring with weird looking fruit which then took on

a baby's face.

Everyone thought it was a miracle,

The widow said she would raise the kid once it fell

not far from the tree

whose roots sprouted from the

burial.

The locals shielded the tree of life from hungry birds who had been curious

and the baby dropped from the branches plump and pink like a pomegranate

and walked away

not like a pomegranate.

If you see him around, please tell them the town is looking for him

and anxiously awaiting next spring:

they've already set up a trap for the next one.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Beatriz Seelaender is a Brazilian author from São Paulo. Her fiction has appeared in *Cagibi*, *AZURE*, *Psychopomp*, among many others, and essays can be found at websites such as *The Collapsar* and *Guesthouse*. Her novellas have earned her both the Sandy Run and the Bottom Drawer Prizes. Seelaender's poetry has been published by *Inflections Magazine*, *VERSON [9]*, etc. "Canon Familiaris", a chapbook in which she turns canonical poems into poems about her shih tzu, Uli, will be released by *Really Serious Literature* in 2023.

3 SIMPLE SAMHAIN SPELLS

1. A Protection Spell Jar

Before you do any spells, you need to be protected. It's essentially step one for absolutely everything. There are multiple ways to cast a protection spell. The simplest is sprinkling salt in every corner of your room/house or staying in a circle of it while you do spells. However, something for the everyday is a protection spell jar.

You will need:

- ∞ A jar or bottle
- ∞ A black candle for protection intent
- ∞ A single strand of your hair to tie the spell to you
- ∞ Something sharp and small (a thorn, needle, pin, etc.) to deflect badness
- ∞ Protection herbs (any combination of salt, black pepper, basil, rosemary, bay leaves)
- ∞ A scrap of paper or a bay leaf to write your name and date of birth on

You may want to use:

- ∞ A pentacle charm (or a charm related to protection) on a piece of string
- ∞ Black tourmaline chips
- ∞ Clear quartz chips charged with the intention of protection (always cleanse them before charging)

As you create the spell jar, keep your intention of protection in mind. You can do this by putting on music or a film that makes you feel safe in a place where you feel most relaxed. If your pets make you feel safe, for example, have them in the room with you.

1. Light some incense and cleanse everything—your space, ingredients, tools, and any crystals.
2. Carve your personal protection sigil into your black candle and light it.
3. Put your something sharp and protection herbs into the jar/bottle. If you have them, add your crystal chips too.
4. To tie the spell to you specifically, add your strand of hair and a bay leaf/scrap of paper with your name and birth date written onto it. You can draw your protection sigil over your name and date of birth if you want to. Roll it up or burn it and put it inside the jar/bottle.
5. Whisper your protection chant into the jar/bottle. That could simply be: "I am protected."
6. Put the lid on your jar/bottle and seal with the black candle wax.

7. If you want to, tie your pentacle charm around the neck of the jar/bottle.
8. Extinguish your candle. Do not blow it out. Cover the flame until it dies.

Put the jar/bottle in a place you will see it daily—every time you look at it, you'll be reminded of the feelings you had while creating it. If you're sceptical about the reality of magic, think of this spell as a little piece of mind magic. Magic doesn't have to be an act. It can be a mindset—a way to channel how we work as a human being in relation to nature or otherwise.

2. Ritual to Honour the Forgotten Dead

You may decorate your altar for Samhain with photos, possessions, or candles to honour your lost loved ones. However, who does this for those who have been forgotten? I do this ritual for them simply because I'm drawn to doing it. The thought of lives and stories being lost through time (or some other means) upsets me, so having a moment to think about them—even though I have no idea of who they are—feels right. If you feel like that too, add this ritual to your Samhain routine.

You will need:

- ∞ Purple candles—one for each group you're representing
1. Light some incense and cleanse everything.
 2. Cast a circle around your altar and ground yourself in whatever way works for you.
 3. Carve who the candle is for into each candle (e.g., 'for the forgotten women'). You may also want to carve a memory sigil into the candles too.
 4. Place the candles in a prominent and safe place on your altar.
 5. Light the first candle and say something like, "You may have been forgotten after you left this world, but you are remembered by me now. This ritual honours you and your life and memory on this night of Samhain." Do this for each candle.
 6. When you are finished, do not blow the candles out because it is disrespectful to do so. Cover the flame until it dies, one by one.

3. Dream Ancestor Connection

If you need help or answers from somebody who has since passed away, this little spell is a comforting way of getting what you need. Before you go to bed on Samhain, say the name of the person you'd like to connect with. Ask for their advice and to meet in a dream. You could do this on behalf of somebody else if you have permission. It can upset and scare people when it works.

