

FEATURING  
ORIGINAL  
WORK FROM

TAYLOR EDMONDS  
CERYS KNIGHTON  
GJ HART  
POPPY JENNINGS  
BEAU BEAKHOUSE  
AND MORE

Issue 1

WHERE DREAMS FOLLOW YOU

# LOGGERS DREAMING

DEAR READER,

Let me introduce you to Lucent Dreaming.

The copy of the magazine you see is our debut issue and we are so delighted it has found its way to you.

Lucent Dreaming is a new independent creative writing magazine publishing beautiful, strange and surreal creative work from emerging authors and artists worldwide. We're only just beginning our journey but with your continued readership we hope it'll be a fantastically bold (and lucent) one.

There are so many humans I'd like to mention in this letter—so many I'd like to thank—from our authors and artists, to everyone who has helped us reached print, and of course the Lucent Dreaming team who have put it all together.

This is my opportunity to profusely praise my extraordinary and wonderful editors, Joachim Buur, Jonas David and Jess Beynon, without whom Lucent Dreaming would still be an idea. They have given so much of their time to me and to this magazine. You are witness to their artistic, editorial and literary talents.

I also want to thank everyone who has submitted their work to us over the last few months for our debut issue. It was a pleasure reading it all and we look forward to seeing more! And, of course, a huge thank you to our published authors and artists for trusting your work to an unheard of magazine. May it do your art justice.

Countless others have helped us bring LD to life and you'll find many of their names at the back of this issue.

All gratitude aside, I sincerely hope you enjoy issue 1.

*Jannat Ahmed*, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Editor-in-chief: *Jannat Ahmed*

Editors: *Jess Beynon*

*Joachim Buur*

*Jonas David*

Cover design: *Joachim Buur & Jannat Ahmed*

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# In Bloom

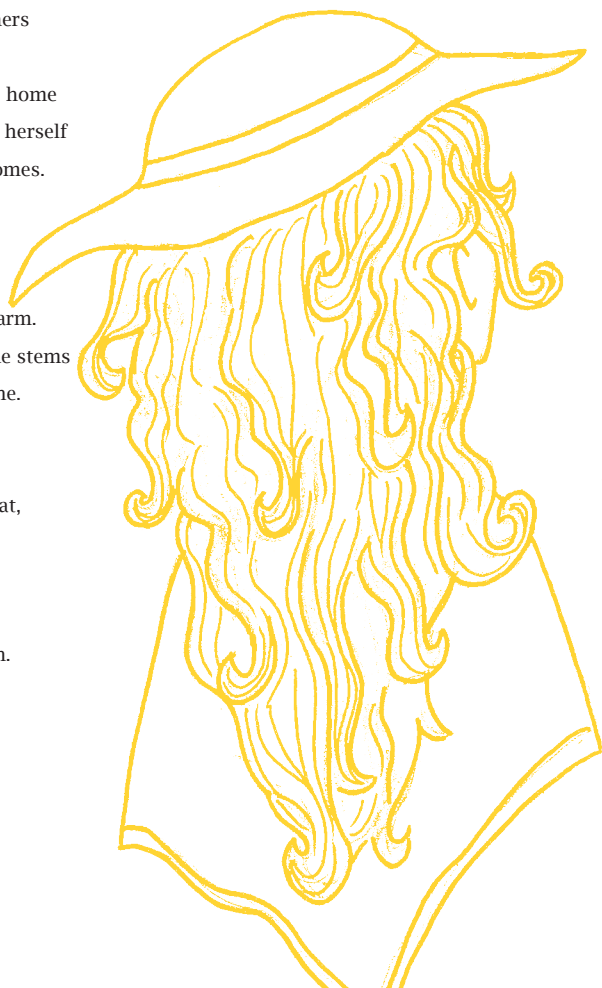
In the summer, we would eat  
handfuls of sunflower seeds.  
Wait patiently for them to plant  
themselves into our intestines,  
root, feed, grow.

My sister wanted to sell hers  
on Portobello Road.  
Bouquets for men to take home  
for their wives, a piece of herself  
blooming in stranger's homes.

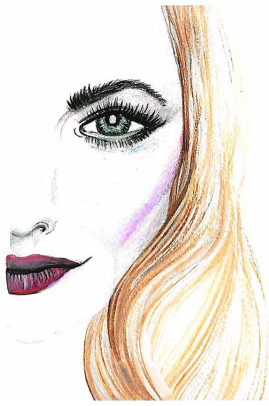
Hers grew first,  
green shoots sprouting  
from the skin of her forearm.  
She said she could feel the stems  
intertwining with her spine.

I imagine her now,  
her curls under a straw hat,  
at the flower market  
on Portobello Road.  
As I pick yellow petals  
from the gaps in my teeth.

*by Taylor Edmonds*

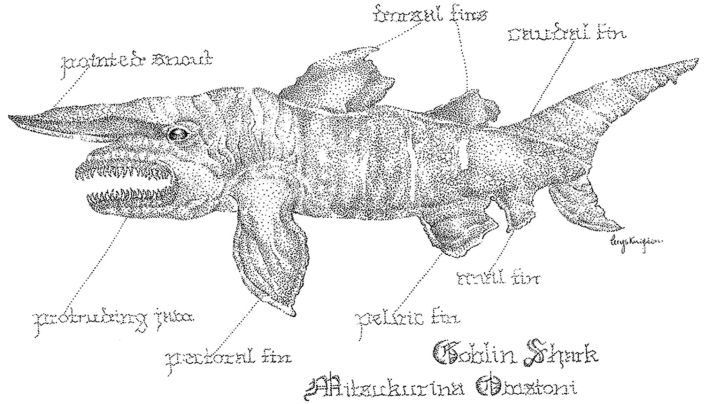
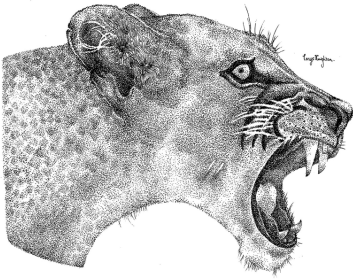






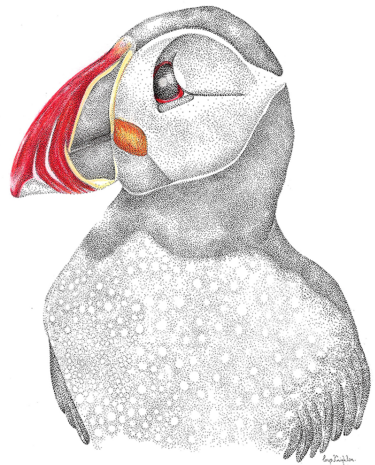
# Cerys Knighton

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# In a Blue Barque

*by Jane Dougherty*

They stole a boat from the riverbank, a blue barque with a white sail. It had been his idea, Haakli, the desert nomad's, not hers. Two slaves on the run; nobody would follow them seaward, he said. Haakli knew nothing of the sea, but Uma had loved his eyes, the way they laughed only for her, even when his master had had him flogged, and so she had agreed. For his laughing eyes and his strong brown arms, she had chosen the barque herself, because she knew about the sea.

Before they pushed the boat into the current, Haakli placed an amulet, a pearl, fat and mysterious, around her neck. To protect her from the sea devils, he said. It was an heirloom, a trinket passed down from one desert tribesman to another. Haakli's people were in awe of anything that came from the sea. He must have thought there was a deal of power in it. She murmured words of thanks because she would not have him think her ungrateful.

Haakli kissed her on the forehead, and

the whites of his eyes gleamed bright in his tanned face. He smiled, a rare and fleeting thing, for slaves only smiled with the private, secret ripple of the eyes. He smiled, and the magic whorls tattooed in blue dye that covered his face shifted into motion. Uma bit her lip and refused to look at the pearl where it lay between her breasts, but her flesh squirmed at the cold touch of deep sea death. He thought it was for the best. She would not tell him what all the sea people knew, that pearls brought bad luck.

The desert nomads knew nothing of the sea, though they revered it and spoke of it in hushed tones. Haakli had told her some of their stories, back there, in the city where they were slaves, and she had smiled at their naivety. She did not smile now, not with the pearl lying cold and pale against her skin, and he with that eager light in his eyes, not understanding. She crossed her fingers and murmured the strongest ward she knew, hoping it would be enough.

The current carried them towards the



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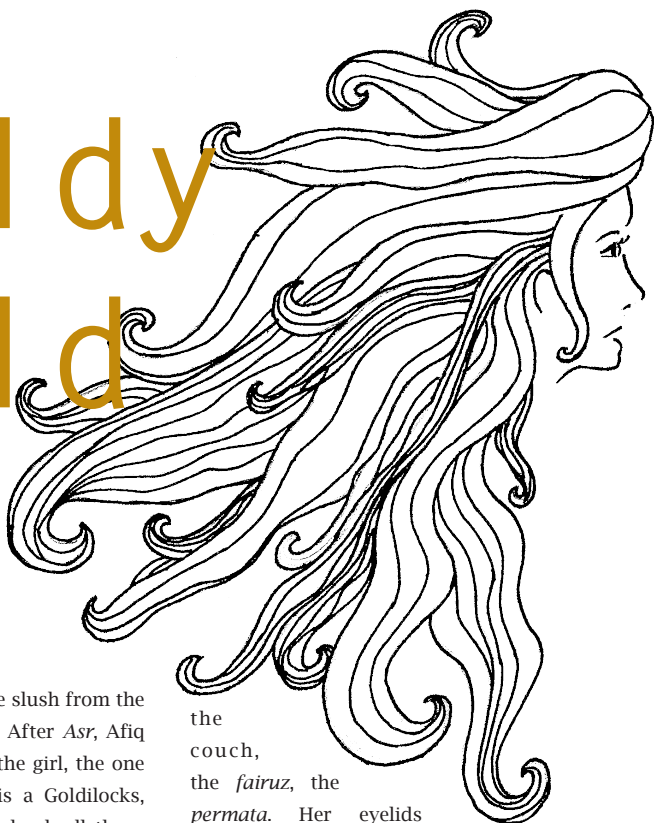
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The cliffs receded into bloody smears caught by the westering sun, leaving the boat in the middle of a torrent rushing towards the vast ocean. She watched Haakli as he stood in the stern of the barque, balancing easily with his spearman's stance, as the craft rose and dipped, thinking only of wide skies and freedom.

Jane Dougherty IN A BLUE BARQUE

# Goldy Gold

by Wan Phing Lim



The rain brings down the slush from the hills and the river is raging. After *Asr*, Afiq walks to the river and sees the girl, the one with the blonde hair. She is a Goldilocks, from the story he read in school, all those years ago. The girl with the three bears. She wears a white shirt and a green skirt. He feels afraid, because he has been seen, but then he feels proud, like a stag who has been noticed. He preens, feels a throbbing and an excitement. He doesn't want to frighten her, but he wants to show himself to her. This is his only chance, his golden jackpot—he may never see her again. His only hope is that she doesn't scream, but she does. She turns and runs away, then trips. Afiq pulls his sarong up and crosses the river. There is a huge pipe that he can balance himself on.

The girl is in a ditch, there is blood along her nose. Her very sharp nose, like the woman on his living room couch. Afiq pushes her eyelids up, he wants to see the colour of her eyes, if they are similar to the woman on

the couch, the *fairuz*, the *permata*. Her eyelids are warm, his hands are shaking, hands that are made for weaving and for art, hands that are not supposed to shake. He is, or would have been, a skilled craftsman, not just a housekeeping boy at Golden Sands. But the eyes are not blue as he expects. They are brown, like the mud, like the river. Shame he doesn't have a pair of scissors with him, but why would he? He is wearing a sarong, there is no place to tuck a pair of scissors in here. He may hurt himself, so no. He must concentrate on the gold, on the yellow. He twirls a lock between his fingers, like wearing a ring. A silky golden ring. The hairs radiate against his dark brown skin, though he is lighter on the inside, because goddammit the sun. He yanks and yanks some more, balls strands into his fist until his grip is strong. Why did he have to wear the sarong today?



Because he had just finished his *Asr* and was coming out for some air. He does not want golden hair sticking out of his chequered sarong.

Blood trickles down her freckled face. He pulls too hard and there are spots of red on the golden locks. The texture is coarse, not fine like Chinese or Japanese hair. It smells like leaves and wet soil, with a hint of girl's shampoo, fresh off the head. He thinks about lifting her school shirt, but thinks again. The girl is barely fourteen, or fifteen, though he couldn't tell with these *Mat Salleh* girls. Afiq holds the clump in his hand, the drops of blood slowly disappearing into the red soil underneath his shuffling slippers. He shakes the hair in his hand, hoping it will "air out" the way he used to "air out" cigarette smoke so his mother wouldn't smell it. His Goldilocks, his gold, his *emas*. His brother, Arif, had been the *anak emas*. But no matter, it is time to keep his hands busy. He could pleat the hair, weave it, braid it into little keychains, into *songket*, *anyaman*, baskets, pouches. Into little fancy bracelets that girls like to wear, like he had seen in school, though school was such a long time ago now. He had not been very good in school so he had to make do with his hands his mother said.

At home the mannequin is watching blank television, a gift from the hotel management. During renovation, they had replaced all the guest rooms with flat screen TVs and were throwing out the old ones. Afiq always had a habit of bringing gifts home. *Sampah*, his mother calls them. He wonders if he was not the *sampah* of the family, the *anak sampah*. Afiq stands in front of the mannequin with hands on his hips, blocking her view and hiding the lump of hair behind

him. He found her one night, bald and broken, in the dumpsite by the loading bay near the hotel car park. She had belonged to the batik boutique at the lobby. Afiq looks at the mannequin, her eyes blue and sad, unblinking, with lashes painted on them. No matter how he had tilted her she could never sit in a proper L-shape. So he had broken her legs so she could sit on the sofa with him at night, like a real human being. Now he brings her legs into the bedroom with him. Her face is a little dusty, and he makes a mental note to clean it, and to check on his mother later.

He knows the time of day by the smell of burning smoke. The sky is turning a dark blue, the orange lamp posts lighting the small lanes of *Kampung Sungai Emas*. The crickets are singing and the river is still raging behind his home. Afiq likes walking to work, it gives him time to think. It makes him less conspicuous and the air is cooler, fresher at night, despite the neighbours' open burning of leaves and plastic bags. The forty or so wooden homes are tucked in a silent compound, away from the tourists browsing the night market along *Jalan Batu Ferringhi*, and one belongs to his mother. Afiq is counting the days, and these are to be her last days. The smell coming from his mother's room towards the back of the house is getting stronger. If he should stop feeding her, she could stop soiling the sheets. And where is Arif, her favourite son? *Abah* of course, is waiting for her in the grave. Ha! When the smell gets too strong, he'll have to bring the mannequin into his room, too.

Did you hear, a girl has gone missing.

What girl?

A *Mat Salleh* girl, from the British school.

Here?

Yes, in *Sungai Emas*.

Isn't that where you live?

Yes, yes... but...

But so what if there's a serial killer lurking around?

Nurul, oh Nurul. It is fate that he meets her again at the lobby, just as he is starting his night shift and she is closing up the boutique. Nurul with the dark brown eyes and the pink *tudung* and the pink lipstick. Nurul the boutique supervisor who had thrown out the mannequin that Afiq had rescued. Would he ever tell her? No.

But no one would kill a foreigner in this part of town, he says, they'd be in big trouble.

She wasn't a tourist though, she was a student.

I hope she's ok, he says, I hope she's not dead.

Nurul looks sadly at him. So where were you today, Fig? Why didn't you answer your phone?

Afiq is not a liar. He has never lied in his entire life. In Islam, there is punishment for liars. I was in bed, he says.

In bed?

Yes. After he had come back from the river, he had gone back to bed holding the lock of hair. Will he ever invite Nurul to his home? Wouldn't his mother like that? Nurul is a real girl, a Muslim girl, friendly, courteous. But Nurul would have to meet his dying mother and sit with his mannequin girlfriend on the couch, unless he could

somehow stash her away, behind his house by the chicken coup. Not a good idea.

How's your mother?

The same.

Is she still on medication?

Yes, but she cannot get out of bed.

*Insyallah*, Fig, she will get better soon.

Afiq does not like stealing time from work, and he does not like going near the sea, but Nurul insists that they sit by the rocks of Moonlight Bay, just for an hour or two. There is always a lock of hair in his pocket for when he is jittery or nervous, but tonight he has left the golden lock at home.

What is it? Nurul coos. Are you thinking about your *Abah* again?

Maybe. He shrugs.

Fig, the tsunami happened fourteen years ago, *Allahyarhamha* he must be so proud of you today and you know that.

With Nurul, he could unwrap her *tudung*, touch her hair, hold her head close to his chest. Except that Nurul would not let him, at least not in public. But what was the point of coming out here, in the darkness, by the sea, with hardly anyone around if nothing was going to happen? On many nights, he had smoothed over the mannequin's polished breasts, which had no nipples. Perhaps the boutique owners thought it wise to use a modest storefront model. And Nurul is the embodiment of that—Malay modesty, Malaysian culture—values to promote to Western tourists, a modest store with a modest mannequin and a modest supervisor, a girl who knows how to *tutup aurat*, to cover

herself. But he wants to see if Nurul's breasts are similar, so he necks her, slowly at first, until she relents, and he slides his hand beneath her top to pull her brassiere down. Nurul yelps and slaps him on the cheek. The sensation burns his face. He feels a flash of shame, anger, pulls his hand back.

You're crazy, Afiq!

Perhaps he can weave them into a wig for the woman on the couch, now waiting on his bed. Afiq twirls the hairs around his fingers, wears them like rings, lays them across his forehead like a cold towel, coils them around his neck—like a noose?

He puts them in his mouth—spits—because they taste like soil. Soil and blood,

**“He opens his bedside drawer to pull out the golden lock, twirling it round and round his fingers, bringing it to his nose, breathing in, breathing out.”**

He half walks, half runs, and when he reaches home, he pinches his nose, whisks the mannequin off the couch and slams his bedroom door shut. He opens his bedside drawer to pull out the golden lock, twirling it round and round his fingers, bringing it to his nose, breathing in, breathing out. Already he is starting to calm down, already he is feeling better. He looks through his drawer, the only place he has control. A broken radio, buttons in a tin box, stolen things that go unnoticed. He looks in the trash, picks from the carpet, never taking valuables because the guests will know, and he will lose his job. Golden Sands is a good hotel; it has a strict policy. Little bars of soap, bundles of shower caps, sewing kits, plastic bags for sanitary pads, for storing things he doesn't want to lose. He loves the buttons—red, green, brown, black, white, translucent, opaque. Small, medium, big, with four holes, two holes, he pulls them from clothes in the wardrobe, but sometimes they're already on the carpet, so they're automatically his.

The collection of hair is now like a thin layer of cloth—black, white, brown, grey, coarse, fine, and now a lock of long blonde.

and wet leaves from the rain last night, the girl's shampoo faded, no longer fresh off the head. Afiq is in a state. His face is still stinging from the slap, so he sets the hair alight—fire, fire! Like he sets the neighbour's cat on fire—meow meow, *kucing gila*, like he wants to set his mother's bed on fire—Mama, just die already! There, he's said it. Because he wants to know what singed hair smells like, and if a neighbour walks in, or his mother if she could, or the police, then they'll think he's the *bomoh* of *Sungai Emas*. And maybe he is, but now he thinks only about the body he left behind. But surely, she must have woken up. He worries about the girl, worries that his fingerprints will be all over her, worries if she will ever grow her hair back.

Afiq lies on his bed. But she is only young, surely she will grow it back.





# The Collection

by Ethan Hedman



Days like this forced Mike to remind himself that he'd rather have a bastard for a boss than be left without a job. He usually commuted to the store by bus, but needed a slow walk to calm down after a shift filled with angry

customers and insults from his grumbling manager. Halfway through his journey home, a burst of applause caught his attention from the nearest street corner. A small crowd had formed beside the sidewalk, captivated by a street performance. Mike joined the circle and silently welcomed the diversion from his day.

The performer was a magician garbed in period attire. He sported a flowing blue coat and a waistcoat to match, with breeches, stockings, and buckled shoes. Long locks of curled hair tumbled past his shoulders, which he was currently using as a prop; he wrapped thick strands of it carefully around a folded card before asking a young boy from the crowd to yank the loose nest of strands straight down. The boy did, and there was no card to be found. Much to the young volunteer's delight, it was quickly discovered underneath his older brother's shoe.

More card tricks followed in quick succession. The magician took a particular glee in tossing cards aloft as tricks were concluded, exhausting several decks as they littered the ground. The climax of the show was the most daring. A woman chose a card, showed it to the audience, signed her name on the front, and replaced it in the deck. The magician then closed his eyes, threw the whole deck into the air, and swiftly stabbed a falling card through the back with a dagger. After the woman kindly confirmed it was her card, he bowed and allowed her to pluck the card from the knife to keep as a souvenir.

Mike applauded with the crowd while the magician took one final bow and began to sweep up the mess of cards with his feet. The children who had watched his show quickly volunteered to help, prompting the magician to produce a few candies from behind their ears as tokens of thanks. Mike stood nearby while his fellow bystanders trickled away, waiting until the performer was free from his audience.

"That was great," he said, walking up and extending his hand.

"Ah, thank you so much." The magician had a dazzling smile and a firm handshake. "I'm just glad everyone enjoyed themselves."

"It's been a while since I've seen anything

that good. Beats the guy who plays guitar outside my apartment." Mike reached into his pocket and began to fumble with his wallet.

"Oh." The magician stepped back, as if the thought of taking money repulsed him. "Please, that isn't necessary. These performances are just as much for my own entertainment as they are for yours. The only thing I really want is to experience the audience while they delight in the magic."

"Really? You've gotta be the first performer I've met who'll turn down a tip."

The magician smiled and shrugged. "That's quite likely. I'd rather give than receive. If you feel the need to part with it, give it to someone who needs it more than I do. The next homeless person you encounter, perhaps, unless you have a favorite charity." He stroked his chin thoughtfully. "I'm fond of Child's Play, myself."

"Fair enough. Hey, I only caught part of your show. Happen to know where you'll be performing next?"

"Ah. Yes, I do, actually. Tomorrow I'll be right over there." He gestured at the modern building behind him, an art gallery that Mike hadn't noticed before. "Inside, that is. I'll be entertaining people visiting the venue alongside a group of my peers. Don't worry, you can still give your money away; there won't be any admission fee. A traveling exhibit is opening here and the curator feels that allowing the general public free access should grant the art some much-needed attention."

"What time?"

"We ought to be around all day. Let me show you where." The man sharply turned and began marching through the courtyard towards the building's tall glass doors. Mike trailed behind, though after a moment the magician slowed his pace so they could walk

shoulder-to-shoulder. "Oh, forgive me, I haven't asked your name."

"Mike. I missed the top of the act and didn't catch yours, either."

"The Great Edmond is at your service, sir," he declared, using the French pronunciation of the name while flourishing his hand through the air. "That's my stage name, anyway. You can call me Ed, or Eddie, if you prefer."

Mike held the door so the pair could enter. The air conditioning was a welcome relief after standing in the sun for twenty minutes. Ed produced a temporary staff badge as if from thin air, waving it at the handful of employees they passed. He deftly navigated the hallways and led Mike to the second level. They stopped before a heavy curtain hanging in a doorway which Ed gracefully slid aside to permit entry.

"The new exhibit," he said, gesturing at the sizable room. The walls were adorned with art, but the area was otherwise an open space. "You'll be able to find us around here. Go ahead and have a look, if you like."

Mike stepped inside and glanced at the walls. It took only a few seconds for him to realize he had little interest in any of the art. "Interiors and landscapes aren't my thing. I've always liked stuff with people better."

"That's my preference as well," Ed agreed, a smile spreading on his face. "Still, on this occasion I find it quite suitable, since my group will undoubtedly be the event's highlight. Due to the setting and length of my performance it will be more subtle than what you saw before, but you should be rather amazed nonetheless."

Ed escorted Mike back to the entrance, idly chatting as they passed a variety of other themed galleries. "It's been a pleasure," he said as they returned to the courtyard, "and I do hope you'll enjoy yourself tomorrow."

"Yeah, I'm looking forward to it." Mike looked at the gallery's glass facade again, studying the hours of operation. "Closes at eight, huh? I won't offer you money again, but could I buy you a drink once you and your group wrap up tomorrow? There's a halfway-decent bar a few blocks away. It's nothing special, really, but the beer's always cold."

"Another gracious offer, but I'm afraid I'll be unavailable." Ed fidgeted in place, tilting side-to-side. "Actually, if you have the time, I could offer *you* a drink, but it'd have to be right away. It may be a bit early, but I'm expected by the rest of my group. There's something of a meeting that has to occur with us before an event like this. You'd be most welcome to come along and meet everyone, if you like."

"Oh. I'm not busy, but I don't want to get in your way."

"Nonsense." Ed waved away the remark. "We have a fine time together as we start to prepare. It's more of a pleasant social gathering than any sort of serious professional undertaking. And there's no obligation for you to stay, of course; you can leave whenever you like without the slightest risk of offending us. We'll be there long into the night. Besides, our performance tomorrow will be all the more entertaining if you meet everyone beforehand."

Mike was convinced. They hailed a nearby taxi and headed to Ed's given destination. Classic reggae softly emanated from the car's speakers through the short ride. Upon arriving at a tall condominium Ed insisted that he cover the fare, producing a folded twenty dollar bill from behind the driver's rear-view mirror. The cabbie grinned and chuckled as the taxi rolled away.

"That's the wonderful thing about simple tricks," he said as they entered the condo

and made their way to the elevator. "They're quick, they're easy, and they can always snag a smile. Hardly any effort is expended, and someone's day gets just a little brighter." Ed tapped the button for the 23rd floor. "To be completely honest, it's actually a trade. I offer them an unexpected surprise and they offer me a brief moment of total adoration. Believe me, there is no greater feeling."

The elevator slowed and opened its doors. Ed led them to the leftmost unit and halted in front of it. "Ah. Mike, I should tell you now, this is likely to be something of a dress rehearsal. We haven't done this sort of work in a few months and are all getting back into character. Don't be surprised if my friends are a bit... eccentric."

said before turning her attention to Mike. "I'm very pleased to meet you. Do come in."

"Thanks. Nice to meet you, too," he said as he crossed the threshold. He noticed that Sangita had bare feet. "Shoe policy?"

"Oh, we certainly don't have one," Sangita said. "Make yourself comfortable however you see fit."

"Her shoes stay off, my shoes stay on. Give me just a moment and we'll get you that drink," Ed said, closing the door and rushing off into another room. Mike opted to keep his footwear and took a moment to get his bearings. The condo was quite upscale and spacious, though it was presently swamped by a motley crowd.

Sangita ushered Mike inside as he started to scan his surroundings. A set of musicians

**"He could not remember attending a more fantastic and flamboyant party in his lifetime."**

"No problem. I've got an older brother and sister. He's a used car salesman and she's a real estate agent. They're always in character, even at Thanksgiving."

Ed laughed and nodded. "Good. You should feel comfortable enough here, then." He knocked twice, waited, and knocked again. After a moment a woman in a bright red sari answered the door.

"Welcome back, Eddie," she said. Mike noticed a hint of an Indian accent. "You're nearly the last to arrive. Who's your friend?"

"Sangita," he said, with a quick twirl towards his companion, "this is Mike. Mike, may I introduce Sangita, a brilliant and beautiful dancer who ardently refuses to be my assistant."

"There's hardly enough time between jobs for me to spend on your hobby," she

clad in red jackets sat on a worn leather sofa, though two had set their instruments aside. The third, a bearded man wearing a dark kilt instead of the trousers his companions favored, was cradling a bagpipe on his lap. He spoke quickly in a thick accent that Mike could hardly understand. His comrades laughed as he greeted the newcomer with a nod and a wink.

A woman with sleek black hair lay on a chair in the corner, her bare legs dangling over one of the arms. She took occasional drags of a cigarette, watching and grinning as a young blonde girl instructed a shaggy dog in a variety of hoop-jumping tricks. She commented occasionally, too softly for Mike to hear at a distance, but always with a sly grin. The dog was elated each time it was rewarded with a treat and pat from its tiny

trainer.

The nearby sliding glass doors revealed a large balcony outside. It was the one part of the condo which seemed to be sparsely occupied, and with good reason: a pair of men in poofy shorts were swinging and thrusting at each other with fencing swords. Both swung their foils wildly, far too quickly to keep their blades at a safe distance from their opponent, though each somehow managed to deftly avoid each incoming blow.

There were plenty of others milling about the rooms. Mike tried not to stare too long at anyone, smiling politely and then averting his eyes when a glance was thrown in his direction. After a few moments, he was rejoined by the magician. "Sorry for the wait, Mike, I wanted to ensure that the snakes were secure. Now, then, let's see about that drink I promised you, shall we? Ah!" Ed exclaimed, entering the adjoining kitchen. "Just who I was hoping to find. How are you, Brother Gilbert?"

"Ed!" A plump friar wearing a roughspun robe rushed over, grappling Ed into a hard embrace. "Welcome back, my boy, welcome back!"

"Thank you. Gilbert, let me introduce Mike, a recent acquaintance of mine who fancies the occasional drink."

"Good, good." The friar clapped Mike on the shoulder, though it felt more like a punch. "Anyone who likes a good brew is a welcome friend in my book."

"Ah, thanks," Mike said, leaning against the counter to recover from the bulky man's well-intentioned slam.

"Would you do us the honor of granting us a drink from your stock, Brother?"

"One drink? Bugger that. Have as many as you like! Here, now, I'll pour us a toast to start with." Gilbert bustled over to a cask he'd set next to the sink and poured

three glass steins of ale, taking great care to examine each one in the light before chuckling with approval. "There. Now what is it we're drinking to, lads?"

"New friends?" Mike suggested.

"A noble toast, indeed. To friendship, then."

The trio clinked their steins together and drank. It was the first of many drinks which Mike would happily accept. Over the course of the first hour he was swept around the condo and introduced to everyone attending the wild gathering. He drank with them, danced with them, and eventually sang with them. In a matter of hours he was quite lightheaded. He could not remember attending a more fantastic and flamboyant party in his lifetime.

Though he had thoroughly enjoyed himself, Mike finally felt the time had come for him to take his leave. The sun was long gone and many of the gathered guests had retreated to quiet, secluded conversations among their peers. Ed reluctantly agreed, having promised that Mike was free to leave at his leisure, but insisted on walking him downstairs and once again paying for his cab fare.

Once they had returned to the sidewalk below, Ed offered his hand. "Thank you, truly, for accepting my invitation. It was wonderful to socialize with someone a bit more ordinary than the members of our colorful bunch for a change."

"No, no, thank you, it was great," he said, using the handshake as an excuse to right himself. "Oof. I had too much of Gil's beer."

Ed laughed, signaling a nearby cab. "Don't worry. The effects of that brew will wear off before you even realize it. Really, thank you for joining us. Your presence made the occasion all the more special, and it'll be some time before we can have a

gathering like this again.”

“No worries,” Mike said, clambering into the taxi. “I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Yes. Oh, Mike? Pick a card.” Ed unfurled a deck in his hand and waited for Mike to make a selection. Mike quickly grabbed from the middle of the deck, not wanting to keep the cabbie waiting. Ed smiled. “Good choice. Keep it. I’ll finish the trick tomorrow.”

Mike nodded and closed the door, inspecting his card: the King of Hearts.

Ed had been right about the beer; by the time he stepped out of the cab he was as clearheaded as he had been in the gallery’s courtyard. By the time he showered and made his way to bed he felt exhausted, but was excited to see the group again tomorrow.

He arrived at the gallery in the middle of the day. Mike navigated the building along the same path Ed had led him, making his way upstairs. The heavy curtain which had separated the exhibit from the rest of the gallery was gone.

Mike was confused as he entered the room, as none of Ed’s group were present. He hadn’t seen any of the performers as he made his way here, and there didn’t seem to be any promotion for Ed’s big event. People just milled about the long room with meandering strides and whispered commentary about the art. It was an ordinary day at the gallery.

And then, as he started to glance at the walls, Mike’s jaw dropped.

A jovial friar from the Middle Ages was shown lifting a glass of his brew to inspect it in the light. He stared lustily at the drink he had labored to craft. The monk’s wide grin and round form were perfectly depicted in an oil painting, the plaque mounted below indicating it was from the late nineteenth century. Beside it hung a black-and-white photograph of a snake handler from Miami Beach, marked as having been taken in 1992.

Mike’s eyes widened as he crept through the collection, already eerily familiar with its contents. A lithograph depicted Scottish musicians from the British Army during the Napoleonic Wars playing a tune for the regiment marching beside them. Nearby, a charcoal sketch showed a magician’s assistant in a sheer blouse lounging casually in a chair, puffing a cigarette while watching a young carnie girl train her dog to jump through hoops. A woman in a brilliant red sari was shown dancing in a small silk painting from Rajasthan while an inked page of a yellowed fencing manual portrayed a pair of Italian duelists.

The largest piece of all was a French tapestry hanging proudly in the midst of the rest. It showed a gathering of nobles watching a show with great attention. Their gazes were transfixed on a magician; a beaming, flamboyant Frenchman who brandished the King of Hearts.

“I offer them an unexpected surprise and they offer me a brief moment of total adoration. Believe me, there is no greater feeling.”

Ethan Hedman THE COLLECTION





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# Water runs endlessly

Water runs endlessly  
in the still & silent room  
A drop of clear glass water  
held  
in the core of a balanced leaf

pools of dark impenetrable water  
where golden fish swim  
below the lilies

The air is thick & humid  
Jungles, mystic orchids  
& gardens of hanging plants  
Rainbow spectrums of light  
on giant heart shaped leaves

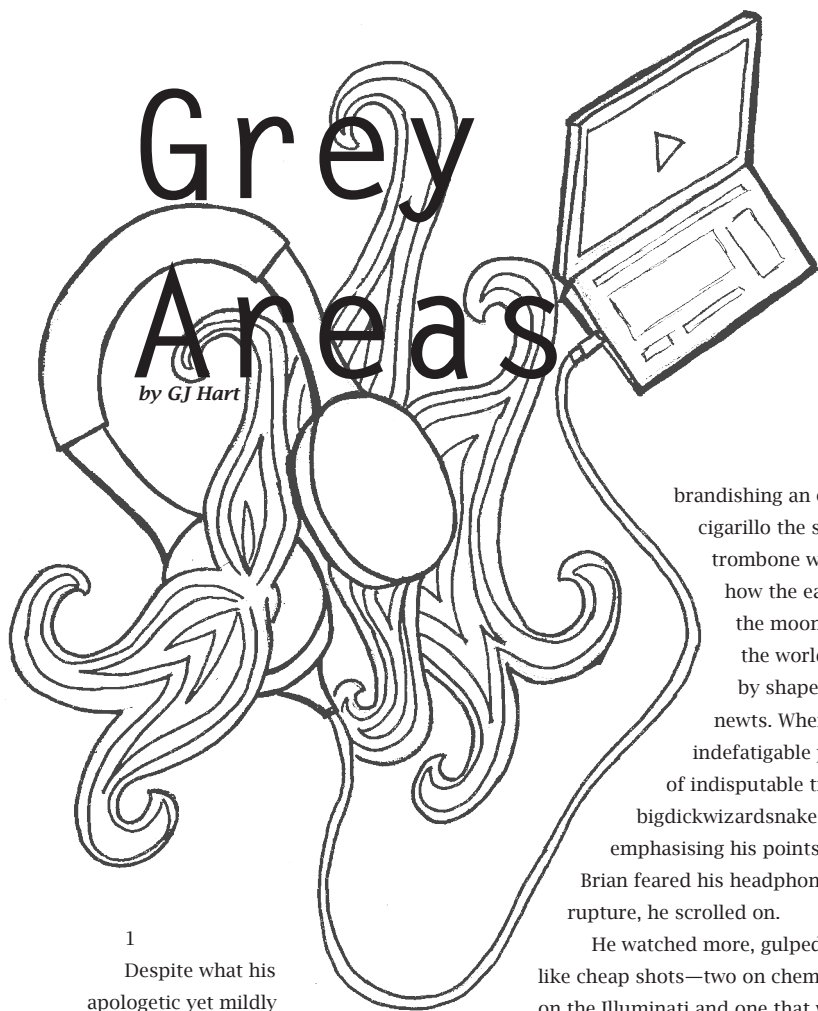
Up in the canopy  
vines & the sound of birds  
purring  
& higher up in space  
yellow glass  
filled  
by a distant sun

*by Beau Beakhouse*



# Grey Areas

by G.J. Hart



1

Despite what his apologetic yet mildly officious text claimed, Brian was not presently resident at a mindfulness retreat on the banks of Lake Windlemere dismantling his *perplexities*. Instead, Brian was doing what Brian had done every night since staggering home to discover Janet's Dear John—lying in bed, watching YouTube as his hand wandered slowly between his bollocks to a family sized bag of cheesy ringogs.

On screen, a fleshy middle-aged man squeezed into an alpaca onesie and

brandishing an electronic cigarillo the size of a trombone was explaining how the earth was flat, the moon hollow and the world controlled by shape-shifting newts. When this indefatigable purveyor of indisputable truth—bigdickwizardsnake121—began emphasising his points so stridently Brian feared his headphones might rupture, he scrolled on.

He watched more, gulped them down like cheap shots—two on chemtrails, three on the Illuminati and one that went to extraordinary lengths—via earnest but crude stop-motion animation—to convince him Michael Jackson was alive, well and running a windsurf school in Sharm El Sheikh.

Just as sleep beckoned and Brian's phone began to slip from his hand, he stumbled on a video that piqued his interest. Unlike the others, it was well produced and provided credible evidence to back its claims. According to its presenter, although countless satellite maps existed online, certain areas were blurred out and

fuzzed over. The internet, she said, kept secrets.

These titular grey areas were dotted erratically about the globe—from tundra to desert—and seemed linked only by their prosaic locations: one behind a dry cleaner's in Frankfurt; another beside a supermarket in Ottawa; another in an overgrown park beside a lugubrious housing estate in Southend-on-Sea .

Why, asked the presenter, should these places be masked from view when, with a couple of clicks, even a casual browser could inspect any number of missile bases or government research facilities? The video offered up a few theories, all of them tentative.

Then, just before the wrapping up, the presenter revealed one last grey area: a short bank of fallow land, hedged between cliff tops and a minor road and situated no more than 5 miles from where Brian lay.

## 2

Brian woke, damp and dry-mouthed from dreams of grey brutes with grey eyes—the *video*. Brian was baffled. How could a place he'd passed a thousand times, on the train to work and before, in his father's rattling car en route to days by sea, exude even a whiff of mystery? He had to investigate and dressing quickly, forwent breakfast (a simple sacrifice since he had none) and headed out to the bookshop on the high street.

He arrived as the shopkeeper was opening up and, wishing her good day, ducked inside and sidled along the aisles until he reached the high, oak cases containing the maps. He pulled one down, unfolded it on the floor and pinpointed the area. He was disappointed to find it

marked by nothing more forbidding than an unassuming knoll. He replaced it and was about to leave when he decided to check a glossy tourist map in the section adjacent.

This time, rather than a gentle incline, he found the terrain marked as a cluster of houses—barely a village—moated by a narrow river. In confusion, he pulled down others and each time found it keyed differently - a coniferous forest, a quarry, the remains of an ancient abbey.

Brian looked up suddenly, expecting to find himself surrounded by tall figures in dark glasses, but the shop, except for the shopkeeper, remained empty.

There was no choice, he had to go, and since he was currently unemployed and as definitively between jobs as the Titanic is between Southampton and New York City, he hurried immediately to the station, jumped the barrier and cowered in the toilet until his train rolled into the station.

Stepping onto the station's deserted platform, Brian was confronted by a woeful scene. A rush hour of weeds—balsam and ragwort, nodding and bored—and between them, obscenities scrawled across every wall. At one end, a ticket booth lay upended and at the other, a waiting room so thoroughly vandalised only its door plaque, rusting on the ground, remained. Brian's heart joined it amid the detritus, saggy condoms and cans, but he continued on, ignoring the migraine left by his dissipating avidity and picking his way down broken flagstones to an unremarkable, unmarked road.

He looked about, squinting, his eyes so hobbled by weeks spent hunched over his smartphone, that the landscape—the swathes of hay and billowing villas and barns big as airships—seemed a dreary mess. With little enthusiasm he set off,

flapping and cracking and pitching his body against the road's easy gradient as if the Matterhorn lay ahead.

But he persevered, and gradually, with each fresh step, his vigour and vision improved. He increased his pace and, looking up, finally saw where he was: beautiful! He nearly gasped and breathing in, felt an approximation of wellbeing—a rare analogue emotion—a *curio*—both wistful and new. He relished it, it was robust and nourishing and completely unexpected. With better ease, he walked on, losing himself to the late summer heat and the tip

“Where are you going?” said Bladthorn, arch and plosive.

“Just out swinging the limbs, having a look about.”

“So, you're an explorer—that's good, inquisitive people are invariably worthwhile. But can I guess what you seek?” Bladthorn tapped at his mouth. “A pyramid or a gateway to another time. The Renaissance or a new world where disease and hunger are stories told to frighten children. No, none of these, I think. So, what is it?”

Brian blushed like an aged interloper at an Easter egg hunt.

**“So, you're an explorer—that's good, inquisitive people are invariably worthwhile. But can I guess what you seek?”**

tup of his soles against the winding road.

Minutes or hours had passed, he wasn't sure, when a commotion roused him.

He turned to see a coach approaching, double-decked, its yellow livery and drooping mirrors lending it a waspish appearance so that, as it swung his way, it seemed to be nosing out a giant flower to alight upon. Brian stepped aside to let it pass.

It stopped, and with a tsk of compressed gas, its door popped open. A small man in a three-pieced suit stepped down to the road.

“Denis Bladthorn,” he said, thrusting out a hand.

Brian distrusted him instantly, his smile was too wide and although smart, his breast pocket was torn, his trousers shiny and his tie dappled with stains. A crooked solicitor, thought Brian, or an honest accountant.

“Brian,” said Brian, stepping back, ignoring the hand.

“Come on, we're no different from you,” said Bladthorn and pointed toward the coach. The windows were crammed with people, all suited and exhibiting the same creeping neglect as Bladthorn. They stared impassively down at Brian.

It was stupid, Brian knew it, but he told him everything. About the video, the grey areas, the one close by, the one he was looking for.

“So, you're literally searching for nothing,” said Bladthorn, “How wonderful! We must give you a lift.”

Bladthorn's uncanny smile remained set, widened even and Brian knew he should refuse, but his feet ached and his legs itched as if crawling with ants.

“That would be grand,” he said.

“Brilliant,” said Bladthorn and stepping aside, ushered him aboard.

3

Taking a seat behind Bladthorn, Brian shuffled himself down into its dense and giving upholstery. The coach appeared

new, sleek and well-appointed with luxuries concealed yet visible in that typical, modern way. But again, as with Bladthorn and his coterie, peripheral deficiencies abounded—tissues littered the floor, an odour hung in the air and from behind drifted gentle, persistent undertones of distress.

Leaning forward, Brian tapped Bladthorn's shoulder. "Who are you people?" he said.

"A society of sorts," said Bladthorn, "Although that makes it sound terribly formal. Simply put, we are like-minded individuals who find solace in a shared aim."

"And that aim is?"

Bladthorn laughed, as if at a joke he'd heard many years ago. "Just to get by, I suppose," he said. "Now please forgive me."

He patted Brian's shoulder and standing, turned to address the coach.

"My friends, after traveling many, many miles, we have finally arrived."

Although innocuous, Bladthorn's words provoked a desperate response—*panic*: the passengers screamed and scattered, tearing at latches and handles and pounding windows until wrecked by their efforts, they ducked and covered. Were bombs inbound, were tornados swirling, was the driver, so enraptured by filthy texts, about to run them off a cliff? Seeking answers, Brian leapt to his feet, but found nothing had changed: their route remained clear, the landscape peaceful and the weather still the best of summer and autumn combined. As he sat, his chair heaved and a wiry fellow in grotty tweeds fell into his lap. "*Please*," he implored. "Gerroff!" roared Brian and pulling himself free, forced his way along the aisle as the windows fogged and the air turned sour.

To Brian's relief, the coach began to

decelerate until eventually it stopped on a patch of uneven asphalt beside an empty open field. The doors opened and Bladthorn swung up an arm and left. The passengers shuffled after him, snivelling and bowed, straightening collars and flattening hair whilst Brian stayed curled beneath a seat, too unnerved to follow. He needn't have worried. By the time curiosity had coaxed him down, a transformation had occurred. The tantrums had vanished, and the passengers—now divested of whatever terrors had seized them—stood at the road side, laughing and bright-eyed.

Linking arms, they stumbled out across the field's muddy tide until marooned by its vastness. Some seemed content to wander, whilst others sat and ate. Brian followed them, moving from group to group, listening as they talked with unbridled enthusiasm about the plainest things: the weather, interest rates, council misdealings and the success of this year's asparagus yield.

"Have you ever been in trouble, serious trouble?" said Bladthorn, now standing at Brian's side.

"No," replied Brian, quick as a sneeze.

"So, are you principled, lucky or just damn clever?"

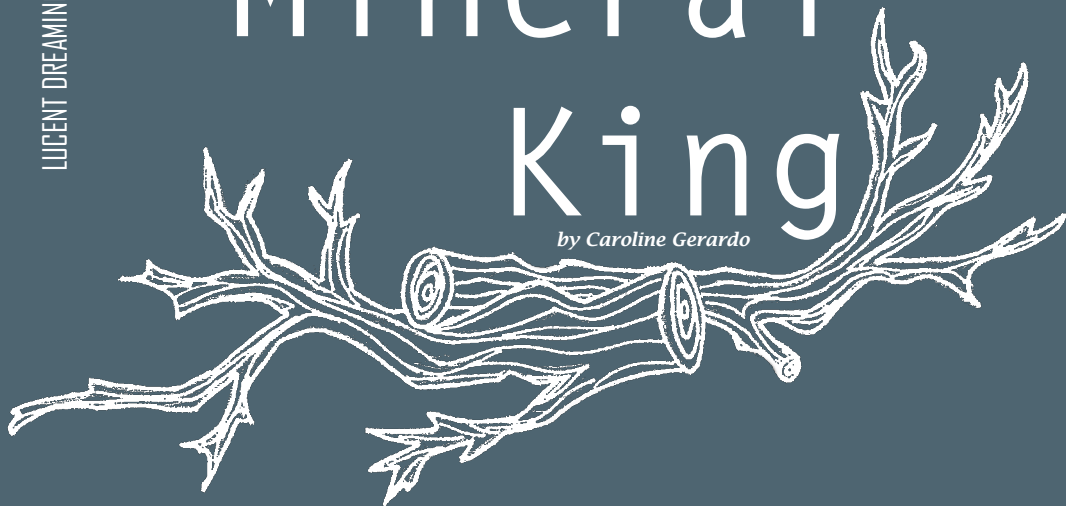
Brian studied the ground. "Can I join you," he said, "travel with you?"

Bladthorn spat down on two worms coiling at his feet. "Do you have a choice," he said.



# Mineral King

by Caroline Gerardo



They pack snowshoes, cross-country skis and climbing gear in the Subaru with their Golden Retriever. Dan wears mirrored glasses while driving.

"My blue eyes need protection," Dan says smirking.

"Did you hear Kaweah River's full?" Lisa asks her boyfriend.

His sneer turns smile, his wire-rimmed reflectors poised on the road. "Every creek and braided channel pour. We should get to the lodge soon—what's the GPS say?"

"A mile."

The puppy whimpers and looks at her.

"I think the pup needs a break," she says.

With the invitation, the dog inserts her muzzle on the console towards the driver. Lisa sneaks a piece of bacon from a baggy to the dog.

Finally at the inn, they park. Lisa's fingers brush back auburn hair loose from her French braid.

"I'll check in and pay," Dan says. "Take

Heidi with a bag." Dan hops as a whooping crane might up to the inn's wooden doors.

"Poop patrol is all I'm good for, hmm?"

Lisa rustles in the rear of the SUV searching for the leash. She kisses the blond puppy's paw for waiting. "Heidi, the Lodge allows dogs," Lisa speaks in a high tone. She pulls Dan's windbreaker over her small frame, looking like a fawn in a *Casablanca* trench coat.

Dan returns waving the room key.

"Room with fridge, I'll unpack the food."

Lisa knows. He has warned her before. Bears tear apart a vehicle for rations.

"Supper in the Gateway?" he asks.

"But we'll have to put Heidi in the room." Lisa frowns.

"She'll be fine."

After unloading, Lisa peeks through curtains from the room. Soon they walk hand in hand across the gravel to the roadside restaurant. Dan thinks of the love mittens his grandmother knit when he was a child, the fingers of two people's



hands in one. Cumulonimbus dense anvil-shaped clouds cover the sky, the sounds of river flows, and a road to forest whistles. Restaurant candlelight shines, revealing the red checkered tablecloths from the windows. Once inside, Dan gestures to sit at the bar. Lisa climbs a stool next to two men with beards—one grey, the other white with yellow stains.

"What'll you have?" The bartender shows a gap in her teeth.

Dan looks at Lisa. He gave up alcohol for Lent. "A chardonnay and a ginger ale," Dan says.

"Sure." The bartender shoots the soda gun into a tumbler. No questions who gets the wine.

The old men chat about plans for demolition of a local bridge.

"It's a historical monument, how can they do that!" Greybeard says.

They describe the California Environmental Quality Act evaluations.

"County, State, Feds won't spend money on the upkeep. Demo's easier." Whitebeard mumbles.

"These autocrats messing with nature should be eaten alive!" Greybeard says.

"I agree, it's a crime to destroy it," Lisa speaks to Dan.

"Right, little lady," Whitebeard says.

"Can't they re-route Mineral King Road, build another bridge upstream and leave a walking bridge?" Dan asks Whitebeard.

"There's an idea!"

Dan whispers in her ear. "Are you sure? You want to have dinner at the bar, sweetie?"

"It's great," she says.

The bartender noses in and recommends Little Kern Golden Trout pan-roasted in bay leaves. A rare catch of pink flesh before the days of trail mix.

After dinner, they take the puppy for a stroll. They wander into some nearby scrub. An owl watches from an oak tree. Coyotes howl nearby. The pup wriggles out of her collar. Dan grabs the dog before she runs away.

"Heel!"

Later Dan and Lisa settle in their room, rust stains in the toilet bowl, but the sheets are clean.

Lights out, under a polyester bedspread.

"Chilly tonight," she says.

"Snuggle, stay warm." His arm lifts exposing his wing tattoo.

She giggles. He surrounds Lisa's body. Music of the river rumbles through the crack in the window. No traffic passes. Under cover of the lodge he falls asleep and snores. She rolls over, her back to him.

Later, Lisa dreams. She's a native woman swimming in a hole, a slippery-sided pond worn by a thousand years of runoff. Boulders rub her feet. Former creek water, now stagnant, stirs with bits of the honey-colored bridge. A cumulous thunderstorm molds heaven into a mushroom storm throwing hail. Her legs shake. Dynamite jumps her mind to awaken.

She tip-toes around the bed and checks the perimeter outside the window. No rain, nor snowfall, secret storms pray towards the mountain. Breaks in the sky reveal stars reflecting in the windshield glass of their car.

In the morning, they re-load the SUV. The vehicle winds up a blacktop road. Their goal is to be first to buy permits and gate codes from the Ranger station. Landscape changes from mossy rocks to blue oak savannah, then incense cedar and ponderosa pine crop through tectonic forces. Graupel opaque grits melt on the windshield wipers.

"Driver-assist intelligence is wasted on off-the-grid roads," he frowns.

"Should we play the book on tape now?" Lisa asks.

"Sure. Who do you think is the killer?" he asks.

She says nothing. She doesn't want to tell him any spoilers.

No cars ride up or down the road. A solid white line reveals and disappears into the black. Fog returns. Mist covers morning sun, a good omen.

The turns of the road sharpen as they reach the Visitor Center. A sign ahead reads: *Permits required for overnight trips into Sequoia and Kings National Parks. Past here: no cell service, no emergency roadside boxes. Do not enter quarantine areas.*

They get out and walk up.

"Your name's on the reservation?" Dan asks.

She nods. "I paid ten dollars."

A woman in a drab uniform and lemon squeezed flat hat leans her elbows on the counter. She's not a tidy Smokey Bear, her body's square. She peers in a three-ring binder.

"Fifteen dollars more is due for off-season permits," she says.

Dan feels his pockets for his wallet. First the jacket, then the wind pants, he pats his body down.

Lisa says, "I got cash, it's covered."

"Here are the codes and brochures about the hazards. Do not go into restricted areas." The ranger hands papers to Lisa.

"Why?" Dan asks.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph killed up there."

Dan doesn't press the ranger, he thinks it sacrilegious or kooky. Lisa keeps quiet. Back at the car, Heidi sits at the wheel.

"Bad dog," Dan says. "Woo!" Dan's hoots

imitate the Great Owl they spotted the night before. It frightens Heidi, and he feels bad.

"Let's go!" he shouts.

He drives hyperactive. In the curves accelerates when approaching wet holes. As they climb, gravel shoulders turn from brown to white. Alabaster tops the asphalt. Lisa squeezes the armrest. Fir trees and sugar pine spin past the passenger window. She's careful not to spoil his inner world joy. Pieces of valley reveal for seconds, then a gesso canvas.

"A bear!" Lisa points.

He applies the brakes with precision and stops the car. A huddled figure scurries. Dan jumps out, following the animal up the hillside. She remains inside, locking the door. Soon he returns with a wide grin on his narrow face.

"Bears aren't dangerous, that's a myth."

She bites the corner of her lip, bargains peace.

"Honey-bears are afraid of humans."

"Garbage bins have metal traps to protect someone," Lisa says.

"Because of drought," Dan explains.

She nods. They continue driving to the first gate. All three get out. Lisa holds the dog. Dan opens the iron-gate box. Below the double leafs of the metal arms, are combination padlocks. Dan plays the combo on each one. He's on his back underneath the assembly. Meanwhile, the puppy gobbles ice crystals like beef jerky, her first experience of snow. After a few tries, the clang of one long arm of the padlock releases.

Dan hops up. He gathers translucent flakes without gloves, and compacts the substance into a ball. He tosses high for the dog to catch. She leaps. A blizzard spatters. Lisa gets into the driver's seat of the SUV, brings the car through the barrier. Dan and

the dog wait behind the open gate. Dan locks the padlock, then switches places with Lisa.

The road narrows. Dan turns off the book on tape. Crunching tyres and the roar of wheel arches make the dog cower. Lisa pats her. The car skids on the ice below the surface. Four-wheel drive of the engine in low balances the ride.

"Time for chains," he says.

"There's the second gate ahead." Lisa points.

On the opposite side of the barrier, a thin man kneels at the gate padlock. A Chevy Silverado is parked on the opposite side. Exhaust fills the air behind the truck. A massive dog circles. Black streaking lines of the animal's tail are a Japanese literati painting. Another dog owner gains their trust.

"You drive, honey?"

"Sure. Maybe that guy will open the gate?"

"I'll talk to him." Dan walks over to the man who bangs the lock against the post of the gate. Echoes of bells ring. Birds copy the sound.

"What's up?" Dan asks.

"I can't get this damn thing to open. I hate to tell you, but there are fallen trees ahead. You ain't gonna be able to get through."

"Parks Code is 1776."

"I know, man, and I gotta get out of here ASAP."

They struggle with spinning the dial. The young man wears a wool plaid shirt. His dog runs loose. Now Lisa and Heidi move closer.

"Your dog, is he a Shepherd Alaskan Malamute mix?" Lisa asks the stranger.

"Max is a special mutt."

The erect eared dog circles Heidi.

The canines lower their heads in playful greeting. Lisa returns to the car to grab a leash.

The plaid man stomps his foot on the lock.

"This is not gonna open, and I really gotta get to town. I'm just gonna leave my truck here." Out of breath, the stranger spits in the snow. His head bobs as if to assess them. "Where you all headed?" he asks.

"Hiking over to Whitney..." Dan says.

"Camping?" The plaid man lifts his eyebrows.

"Yes."

"Good luck. My brother's fixing damage to our store. We had wild animals tear up the place," the plaid man says.

"Animals trying to find food?" Dan asks.

"Somethin' like that. I don't really have time to get into it." The eyes of the stranger in plaid point to the heavens. He lowers his eyes, red from exposure or drinking, and looks straight at Dan. "Don't go to the left at the fork. Rangers closed the area for a bad emergency."

"What kind?"

"Just don't go there." His lips turn down; he huffs impatiently. Chestnut eyes, almond shaped like Heidi's.

"I'm walkin' to town. It's too far for my dog, so I'm leavin' Max in the cab. I don't have booties for hounds like folks in the city got. Well, I gotta beat the sun."

"Twenty miles, it's too far," Dan says,

"Take my car. We'll unload gear and walk to the trailhead. When you return, leave the keys under the back driver side wheel."

Dan tries to hand the man his keys.

"I just can't ask that, mister."

"I offered, you didn't ask. Take 'em," Dan says. The stranger does.

"Now go."

Backpacks, dog booties, snow-shoes, poles, and crampons are removed from the car. Dan and Lisa start the hike. Without looking back, the couple walks up the cloaked cotton road. Hoarfrost interlocks fine tinsel. Blades of needles freeze dry. As they walk, pine leaves and bits of vapor flash to solid, sigh and moan. Within minutes they come upon a tree fallen in the road. It's cut with a chain-saw to allow a vehicle with a high clearance through. Odors of cedar escape fresh wounds. Though cedar wards off moths, flurries seem to fly out from the felled timber.

Dan leads the way. His breath floats back. The pup is distracted by the discovery of snow. Their unleashed animal explores farther than Lisa feels comfortable. Large scat droppings stand out like crows on a Wolf Moon. Heidi sniffs to pick it up.

"Heel, girl," Dan says.

The dog leaps.

"I'll take her?" Dan asks. "Yell if I go too fast."

Lisa-tucks her bangs in the brim of her hat. Dan is fourteen inches taller than she. His footsteps in the snow are too broad apart for her to fit into his stride. She sweats to keep pace. She alternates hopping in his prints and walking the balance beam of a tire track. For now, she steps in a straight line in the tire tracks. Snow on the road is three feet deep and rising. They pass old-growth coniferous forest. The canopy above tangles as they climb. Light rays pop through, bouncing off the fang white of snow. Dan turns back to her and pushes up his sunglasses. She keeps up, with shiny beads of moisture on her nose.

"I'll carry your camera if it's too heavy?" Dan asks.

"I'm good. Okay if I take some shots from here?"

"Sure." He shifts his weight while she unsnaps the case.

"Why did you let that stranger take your car?"

"He's okay. His family owns the summer store in Silver City." Dan says.

Dan gets out a water bottle as she takes the cover off the camera lens. She kneels to steady her arms. Giant sequoias line up on a diagonal, crowded by white fir. An ancient tree fell here. Its trunk provides nutrients to the forest. In the distance, dark clouds accordion climb their fingers over lower peaks. Dan and Lisa share a drink and tighten the backpack back to order. He takes command of the dog.

"Heel, Heidi."

The dog listens. Dan leads with the dog at his side and continues uphill. A posted sign reads: *Danger. Closed for winter. U.S. Federal Lands No entrance to the LEFT. Quarantine.*

The map to High Sierra Trail is to the right. They route around Silver City to the Western Divide to set camp. Lisa's footprints display her right heel is first with toes outward but left is light on the toes. The compression makes the positive space turn blood red in white feathers.

"Dan!"

She looks down. Dan's prints appear on the ground, exposing blood.

"It's carotenoid algae."

She touches the print. It doesn't melt in her glove. The foot engraving in the drift is as if plaster of Paris stained with iron oxide, a slight red. Lisa shrugs and continues uphill. Her eyes dart around, alternating between the horizon and the ground. Her boots squeak on fresh crystals. Heidi remains enamored with everything fluffy and white. The sound of a gunshot interrupts.

"Did you hear that?"

"Snow mobile backfire, or a tree fell,"

Dan says. "Keep your head up, Lisa."

"Snow-shoes?" she asks.

He nods. They assist each other, snap balls of boots in and tighten the nylon straps down. The dog has snow boots that they practiced with, now walking upon the surface of the dusty snow moves faster. The foot loses a fraction of the sense of balance in toes but gains a floating, less effort stride.

Lisa moves her floppy hat to her chest. Trees laden with snow shade the sun. Her right-hand pats the folding knife in her thigh pocket. The fabric rumples, hard surface reassures. The trail width allows only single file. They climb over granite covered in downy marshmallow cream. A sigh of breath and snap of snow are sounds that join them now.

Lisa concentrates on floating on top of the thin, variable pack that's spongy as peat. It's cold, but a body core creates warmth. Hiking, like sex, is a journey. Fire held in by thin outer wind layers, alpaca, and manmade fibers. She concentrates on how Dan's back moves in time with the wind through the nearby pines.

"Dan, I love you," she says softly.

He doesn't hear it. She breathes deeply. Her shoulders relax. A gloved thumb goes up. She demonstrates inner kick by speeding her climbing pace.

She stops. There are tracks in the snow. Where the mountain had few bunny prints, watermelon stains, and windswept drifts, new prints loom much

more massive than Heidi's. She examines since Dan's head has been up, not down-

"Dan," she says. He comes back to her.

"Bears have five toes, this is four claws,"

Dan says.

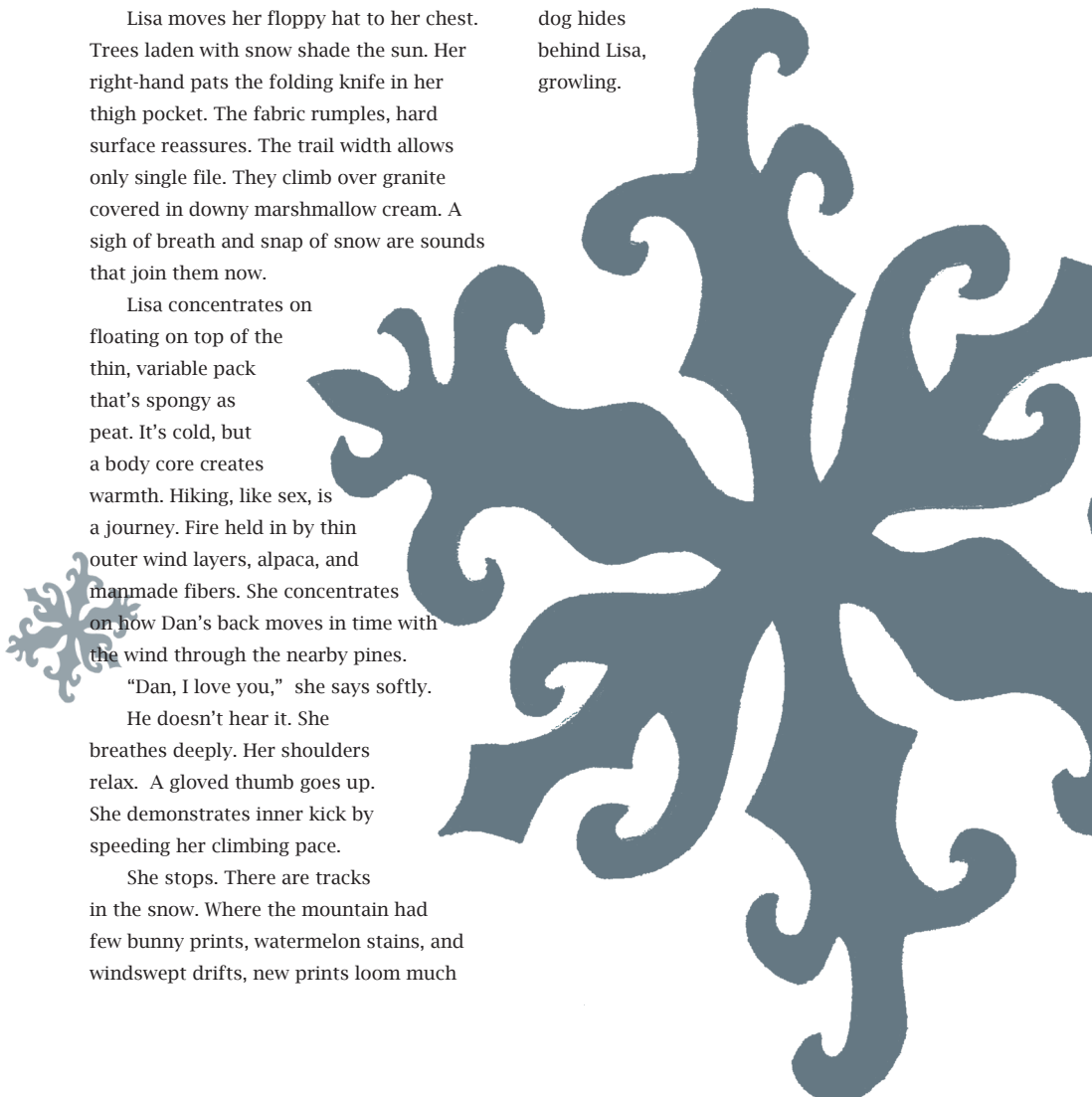
"Wild dog?" She looks at their puppy.

"No wolves this far south of Oregon. It's a huge animal."

Heidi barks.

"Three times her footprint. Quiet, girl."

He stands between Heidi and the direction of her nose. The dog hides behind Lisa, growling.



"Something is following us," Lisa says.

"Keep moving, you lead now."

Lisa quivers—not from the icy wind, but from Dan's unusual gesture of protection. Her legs stride wide. No complaints that her left arch shoots pain signals. Picking her knees up higher, she moves faster.

"Hustle to the rocks ahead." His voice waivers. He shouts, "Move!"

She jogs. Heidi heels at her side. The tone of Dan's voice behind her encourages her. The crampon catches her pants repeatedly, cutting her calf muscle. She stumbles. Dan lifts her by the armpit.

"You can do it." His hand is on the small of her back.

At the crest, a group of boulders peek through the snow. With a wall of stone behind, Dan and Lisa turn to face whatever stalks up the forest, as if the sun rises to witness the disaster. Dan holds a survival knife, and in her glove is the foldable blade. Wild below carries no scent. New snow kicks in a whirl. All three pant. Steam rises from their mound. Then silence. The stalker doesn't strike. A wind drift sends glassy snow.

Dan digs up rocks, throwing them down. Stones bounce off trees, creating shatter sounds as icicles fall and pierce the cover of dove white. At his feet, a snow flower reaches up like a maroon fiddle fern. He steps on another crimson hemorrhage asparagus.

"What's that scaly thing?" Lisa asks.

"*Sarcodes sanguine*. We need to get to Silver City. Let's set a fire before dark."

"People don't live there in the winter. The sign said not to go there," Lisa says.

Dan repeats his plan, "We need shelter."

The dog barks. They move upwards. The trail is steep; Lisa raises an arm to allow oxygen into her lungs. Whiffs of a carcass

and wet weeds rise.

"Stitches." She pants the word.

A sharp stab between the ribs, Lisa leans forward while jogging. Dan's behind. Kindness pushes her soul.

"Shout aggressively." Dan raises his arms as well. He scans the area, seeing Sequoias, rocks and flour snow. No tracks. A burned cabin is in the ankle of the mountain below. The roof is half caved in. One tree rises through the center. Nature takes back her own.

"This is Silver City. Start the fire," Dan says.

Sweat drenches. Steam flows as if a train engine rolls, coal smoke behind. Icicles fall from the trees. Whistling surrounds. He swings the sheath knife, fumbles it while running behind. Both of his climbing poles transfer to one hand, as he picks up the blade. She jogs ahead.

"Cabin!" she screams.

They head to the log structure. Boarded for the winter, because the road has become impassable.

A cottage painted Kelly green with brown plywood boards secured to the windows waits ahead. Dan takes the lead. Prying the window panel, then shoving a blade into the corner of the wood crux, he loosens the nails. Pieces of the green frame and track fall to blanket white, the glass exposed.

"Good they didn't use bolts."

"Climb in; you're small. Be careful."

He takes the dog leash. Tether hooks to the corner of the window. She drops her pack. Then he boosts her into the darkness. A spider's web grabs. She swats fibers. Clanging attracts the wolves. A crack of light from a rectangle ahead, space around the door illuminates the path.

"Hurry, they're here."

Wolves chase prey for miles. They wait for panic. Heart pounding in her neck; the odor of fear is a bitter pill. She prays that she doesn't emit that smell. The mob outside sends in the big males. The animals squeal as Dan fights them. He fights two, protecting his neck with one arm while swinging a knife. One beast hangs on the arm with fangs deep in his muscle as he stabs another. She opens the door. Dan and the pup rush in, Lisa slams the door shut while Dan tosses his backpack and poles.

"Fire!"

He rummages. Wood stacks in a bin. The owner set the cabin up for spring thaw long ago. He locates long, stick matches and newspapers. He examines the flue from inside the smooth, rock fireplace. A clanking noise announces when he opens the metal flap. The sky above is a dusky hour before the billowy mass smothers the black sea. Outside, rustling, panting and vast paws scrape. Wolves howl.

Newsprint accepts the spark. A slow flicker flashes. It fails to catch the log. Hasty, Dan adds tight crumpled papers. Smoke ensues. With his pole, he removes the smoldering wad to allow air flow. The wolves circle the house. Black paws jump at the window Lisa climbed through. She slams the fire iron at the claws. Darkness hides the well-oiled locomotive outside.

Whooshing sounds of brooms clean the foundation. Wolves leap like flames that climb up shrubbery or ivy clinging to a house. They want the eaves. They eat at the roof. Dan tosses a log at the open window. A whelp calls out in response.

"Block it up!"

Dan fans the paper again and blows upon the embers. She turns a table on its side and faces it to the hole. Next she drags a mattress, rummages with her LED light.

Heidi trembles. When the fire in the hearth begins to build, the light exposes blood oozing from his torn sleeve and pouring down his shirt and waist.

"God, we need to bandage that!"

"Secure the cabin first," he says.

Fire blazes inside the river rock chimney. Billowing smoke ought to scare off wild animals, but panting sounds continue to circle the cabin. The wolves work together to find a way inside the structure. Wolf families bond for life. Hunting practiced and played.

Dan puts his good arm under himself to rise, but he can't stand.

"Look around for candles, knives, weapons. Those wolves aren't going anywhere for a long while."

The cabin's one room. Lisa pulls out knives, forks, tape, matches from disheveled drawers and boxes. She rummages through a fishing gear bag and locates a battery powered lantern. Dan knows his cell phone has no bars, but he stays on the floor and checks just in case.

"Nothing useful."

Lisa can't shake the sight of Dan's blood.

"There's a video cam in the center of town that broadcasts a live stream on a website. In the morning, Dan, we have to go out there and write 'help' on the snow."

"I've seen the feed. People contact Rangers..."

Rapid clawing and digging rattle the broken window. Lisa moves to Dan with dish towels and a first aid box. His knees are up and head between his legs.

"Not much in here but gauze and what's in my pack." She realizes her backpack is on the ground outside.

She eases off his jacket. He groans. The arm's torn, exposing muscle and bone.

She pulls a para-cord tie from her coat to tighten off above the tear.

"Not a tourniquet, just slow the bleeding down," Lisa says softly.

Blood flows from the wound. He doesn't argue. Heidi licks his palm.

A gauze ring winds around the open gash. She covers the thin layer with the dish towels and duct tape. The bleeding doesn't stop.

"Rest your heart rate. Like yoga," she says. His neck's bouncing. "This needs sewing."

Dan's brows lower., He trembles. She kisses his forehead, but he doesn't respond.

she must draw a Save Our Ship code on the ground in the square.

"You stay. Protect Dan," she tells Heidi before the sun arrives.

Heidi turns her head. Lisa places knife in Dan's hand, though he's unconscious now. An image of using Dan's blood to write SOS flashes in her mind.

She heads out the cabin with knives, poles and a flaming log. Once outside she secures the door, but realizes the lumber is cumbersome. She leaves it near the broken window. The wind stills. A crystal Christmas morning greets her. Uncertain the distance, she hustles in the snowshoes. Prayers come to mind, but are unspoken for fear the

**"The animals squeal as Dan fights them. He fights two, protecting his neck with one arm while swinging a knife. One beast hangs on the arm with fangs deep in his muscle as he stabs another. She opens the door."**

"The fire's catching," she says, stroking his hair.

The scratching at the door repeats. Heidi growls. Lisa spots an andiron. "Good as a weapon," she says, mostly to herself.

The tool isn't solid iron, she holds it above the fire. In the cabin, and with Dan stabilized but weak, they hunker down for the night. They may run out of fuel. Wolves don't rest. They're a tornado at bay.

Lisa plans. Morning light she'll make a sign at the web-cam in Silver City. Dan passes out. A puddle of blood makes a D shape around his frame. The wolves howl. She refuels the fire and jumps when the clawing restarts. Heidi hides under her legs. With a swift swing the fire iron snaps against the window frame. Chairs propped against the opening shudder. Lisa knows

wolves will hear. Running impossible, she hurries. Town square looks like an island on a lake of bridal veils.

Beyond the clearing, the wolves wait under spruce trees. Her fist grips the knife. She cuts fir branches and moves fire logs from a pile into letters. Females of the pack crawl towards her project, waiting for an opportunity when she drops her guard. Lisa sees them stalk, but gestures to the camera now that two letters are complete, invoking a human to notify officials.

As she drags firewood to the camera front, the female pack surrounds. She hazes them with the branches on her shoulders like a scarecrow. The alpha girl outweighs Lisa. Lisa yells. Daylight doesn't scare the girls.

Six wolves move low to the pale



blue cold and begin an attack. Two animals charge from north and south. Lisa hits one with the knife, but skin deep, and not enough to intimidate the others. They see her as a bunny rabbit. As the alpha charges Lisa, she hears steel pans banging and a man scream. Her arms bitten, she protects her head and neck. A second passes as she realizes the big female runs. Her head spins. A man bundled in furs motions for her to come forward. With his make-shift crutch, he bumbles towards her in the drift.

"Get up. The mongrels regroup." He holds a rifle. Silver pan lids sit on the snow. Reflections of light scatter over the surface of the frozen angel white. She trips behind his ragged figure into a burrow that leads to a house cellar. He lights a lantern.

"How many of you?" He asks.

"My boyfriend's gravely injured," Lisa says.

"Where?"

"Green cabin," Lisa says.

"Slope side?"

"Yes." She nods her head.

"Stefansson place is abandoned. The males are out here hunting. The females stick closer to the lab next to here."

"What's your name?" she asks.

"Frank. Biomed Corp cross bred wolves with dogs, for experiments, for drugs, skinned the sick animals alive for pelts while the pack watched."

"What?" She checks the bleeding on her arm. The laceration is not deep, just superficial bites.

"They shut down the lab. We came to find the truth; my family ran the store here for four generations."

Frank's veins and arteries bulge at every surface, a volcano of blood pressure must release. His Adam's apple pounds a blow

signal. Seismologists are palm readers with statistics. Lisa is no expert; she fears Frank, in his loose, animal skin coat, is near death.

"It's a good thing my brother come back."

"What's that?" Lisa asks.

"Otherwise, you might have been dinner for those she-wolves."

"The Silverado. And Max the dog."

"Yeah, that's him."

"How'd he beat us up here?"

"He knows this whole place," Frank said.

The sound of a helicopter blows harder above than the owl from the night before, interrupting the discussion. When a cauldron of buzzards circle, the music is the same. She waves, no longer fearing the wolves.

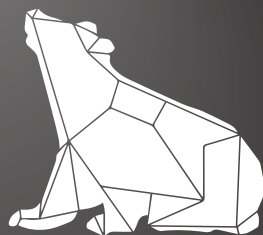
The helicopter announces on a loudspeaker, "Station got your message."

"Prayers answered, we're saved." Lisa squeezes Frank's hand.

When the helicopter lands, the wolves hang back in the brush, allowing the sheriff to load Lisa and Frank. Then the helicopter circles down to the green cottage with the tree in the center to rescue Dan. When the team pulls Dan out of the green cabin, he is pale. He grabs Lisa's wrist and doesn't let go. Knowing he and Heidi are alive, Lisa cries tears that freeze on her cheeks.

Fire blazes inside the river rock chimney. Billowing smoke ought to scare off wild animals, but panting sounds continue to circle the cabin. The wolves work together to find a way inside the structure. Wolf families bond for life. Hunting practiced and played.

Caroline Gerardo MINERAL KING



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# I'm convinced that faeries live here

It is hidden 'twixt the feather-light  
Sprigs and deadly thin thorn bushes  
That drape around the pool, blinding  
One realm from another.

The pool sits like a mirror  
But I don't see myself peering  
Into the metallic basin  
Two steps beneath my feet because  
There only exist the trees.

I hear the wind beyond the barbs  
At my back, beyond the entrance  
I stumbled upon but I feel  
No breeze between my fingertips  
In this timeless find of mine.

The sun is broken by shards of  
Twigs and leafy limbs that arc above  
My head and descend in spiralled  
Tendrils that I can almost reach  
And twine around my wrists.

Would they carry me to the dwelling  
Where fairies trap our tempted souls  
Just beyond the reach of lucidity  
Beneath the pool's façade?

*by Poppy Jennings*

Twigs and leafy limbs that arc above  
My head and descend in spiralled  
Tendrils that I can almost reach  
And twine around my wrists.

Poppy Jennings I'M CONVINCED FAERIES LIVE HERE

# Dream Journal: Writing Tips from our Editors



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## Cerys Knighton

### ARTIST

Cerys Knighton is a Welsh artist and book illustrator specialising in pen and ink pointillism. Her art takes inspiration from the natural world. Cerys uses a combination of nature and studies of anatomy to draw from her medical humanities research looking at manic-depressive illness. She also draws from her own experiences of bipolar, with the goal of sharing findings from the research whilst also raising awareness about mental illness. This was the aim with her debut solo exhibition at Insole Court, entitled 'Drawing Bipolarity'. This issue sees a piece of Cerys' concept art.

@CerysKnighton | cerysknigtonart.com

## Taylor Edmonds

### POET

Taylor Edmonds is a Creative Writing Graduate from South Wales. Some of her publications include *Butcher's Dog Magazine*, *The Cardiff Review*, *Ink*, *Sweat & Tears* and *Paper and Ink Zine*. Her best talent is daydreaming out of a window when she's supposed to be paying attention to something important.

@tayloredmonds | taylorreadsandwrites.blogspot.co.uk

## Jane Dougherty

### AUTHOR

Jane Dougherty is Irish, brought up in Yorkshire, and has degrees from Manchester and London universities. Her working life started in the wine trade in Paris, before moving to Bordeaux. She now lives in rural South West France and writes. Her stories mesh the magical and the apocalyptic, horror and romance, and the real and the imaginary cohabit on the same page. Her first YA post-apocalyptic fantasy trilogy is published by Finch Books. She has self-published a collection of folk tales, "The Spring Dance", and has poetry and short fiction published in anthologies, literary journals and magazines.

@MJDougherty33 | janedougherty.wordpress.com

## Wan Phing Lim

### AUTHOR

Wan Phing Lim was born to Malaysian parents in 1986 in Butterworth, Penang. Her short stories have appeared in *Catapult* (USA), *Ricepaper Magazine* (Canada) and anthologies by Monsoon Books (UK), Ethos Books (Singapore) and Fixi Novo (Malaysia). Her story 'Snake Bridge Temple' was selected for Kitaab's Best Asian Short Stories 2017 and Buku Fixi's New Malaysian Writing 2017. She is currently based in Kuala Lumpur.

@wanphing | wanphing.com

## Ethan Hedman

### AUTHOR

Ethan Hedman is a speculative fiction writer from South Florida, the land of he humidity, and hurricanes. He conjures up new stories from his home in Cutler Bay. Ethan started writing short fiction in 2016. His work has been published in a variety of online publications including *Trembling With Fear*, *Speculative 66*, and *Wax Seal Literary Magazine*. Some of his stories have also been read as episodes of 600 Second Saga, a speculative fiction podcast. Ethan has more work forthcoming in various anthologies, including *Tales of Ruma*, *Unrealpolitik*, and *Darkling's Beasts and Brews*. Writing aside, Ethan is a secular humanist and occasionally wreaks havoc on mechanized combatants with ELK Robotics, a local robot combat team.

@EthanTypesWords | ethanhedman.com

## Beau Beakhouse

### POET

Beau Beakhouse is a poet, filmmaker and Lumin co-editor living in Cardiff. His poetry and other writing is predominantly focused on the spiritual, understanding consciousness and widening perceptions. Experimental leanings. Breaking out of concepts surrounding arts possibilities. Belief in direct action to change circumstances. He has poetry upcoming in Lumin and Artis Natura.

## GJ Hart

### AUTHOR

GJ Hart currently lives and works in London and has had stories published in *The Molotov Cocktail*, *The Jersey Devil Press*, *The Harpoon Review* and others.

@gj\_hart

## Caroline Gerardo

### AUTHOR

Caroline Gerardo, author and poet, was born in Cincinnati and raised in a large Catholic family. She is author of two novels, *Toxic Assets* and *The Lucky Boy*, and her poetry and short fiction has appeared in *Olentangy Review*, *Narrative Magazine*, *Midwestern Gothic*, *Entropy*, *Sleet*, and *One Stop Poetry* to name a few. Caroline currently lives half time in Wyoming and California with her children.

@cgbarbeau | carolinegerardo.com

## Poppy Jennings

### POET

Poppy Jennings grew up in Leeds, West Yorkshire, but moved to Cardiff to study English Literature. She now lives in London and works in publishing but continues to write and read poetry at local events. Her publication in Lucent Dreaming marks her literary debut.

@poppyleeangel



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