

MYTHOS

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SPIRITUS MUNDI REVIEW

ABOUT THE COVER

Jorōgumo are a creature of Japanese mythology, said to be capable of shape-shifting between the forms of a beautiful woman and a giant spider. Many ancient tales tell of them using their human forms to seduce and lure in men before revealing their true form, ultimately ending with the death of their victim.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Reader,

When submissions opened for this issue, I was beyond excited to see the amazing pieces writers and artists from all over the world would submit. Mythology has endured over thousands of years, a unique footprint of each culture and their values and beliefs. In this issue, you'll find pieces depicting Japanese, Irish, Latin American, Egyptian Greek, and Roman mythology, a small taste of the rich and complex world of myths.

You'll find rhymes and retellings of Medusa, Proserpina, and Hestia, an elegy for Athens, a reflection on Helen of Troy. The work of 14 talented artists and writers from around the world.

Thank you as always to the incredible SMR staff, our contributors, and all of our readers. Your continued interest, dedication, and creativity is what drives this magazine as we continue to grow and evolve. With that, I hope you enjoy this issue as much as we have enjoyed creating it.

Sincerely,
Breanna Crossman
Editor-in-Chief



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MEDUSA'S ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE

Sara Siepker

From her cave:

snow an ivory blade cutting the sky, the tide moving like great exhales, sea stretching to invisibility, seething foam along the shores, burbling white, gulls cries an ache from their throats, her sisters calling from afar, crimson sunsets, nights, sunrises heaving themselves forward into bruised shades of daybreak, trees made bare by winter, no fruit, a naked beach, coalescent greenery that grew back, the fruit budding and swollen, sea a vitriol of blue, the movement of the world as round and cyclical as her days, but she stayed.

In her cave:

slated stone, fragments, fractured furniture, granite bodies belittled to sentiment, unseeing gazes glazed in grey, eyebrows permanently fixed in expressions of fear, the frigid touch of these men and their eyes and the cave, the lonely tang of her voice, a stagnant sound, burnt flesh from the bonfire she stoked to keep warm, staring into those flames and watching the flesh of the trees wither to ash, the wash of the ocean outside stuck around the mouth of the cave, caught in its teeth, it is so quiet in here, the weight around her ankles of a fear which paralyzed her, which held her still.

And when she was killed:

only herself, day after day, a red tide of time fleeting without her.
when he took her head, she was grateful.

PROSERPINA

Clover O'Mordha

as she lays in the gardens of pluto
slipping between delicate grass vines
pomegranate seeds slip from supple cherry lips
dripping the sweet nectar of innocence

it smells of flowers and crisp spring ozone
the beautiful, the seen trace of girlhood
white linen hems gracing the warm ground
the girl sways to the heavenly sounds

his heart beats for that precious golden hair
the sparkle of sweat on her smooth thighs
inhales the lovely, languid scent
of sacred roses laid upon the chest

those gardens of bodies
dead & decaying
bruised & broken
that nectar, that curse

rotting, burning flesh
tainted by the fire
fire, and more fire
agonizing screams

PROSERPINA

Clover O'Mordha

rotting, burning flesh
tainted by the fire
fire, and more fire
agonizing screams

SKY SCARS

Aditi Nair

stretching to infinity, we \ see rippling scars
cloaking him \ in grey-red streaks as he now reaches out
prayers kissing deep \ blue eyes atop the First Kingdom
gazes \ down his kingdom true \ blood and brethren too.

uncaring of poison \ eyes wicked smiles alike
he spews \ out hurt and vitriol, wrapped \ up in his pride.
blinded by his very anchor, skinned \ down to his heart
he gazes \ on unseeing and his heart begins to \ pulse \

he watches all lives up \ and down, from his old plundered heart.
in towers \ once tall, gleam and gold, King's \ crown tumbles down.
stretching to \ the stars above, he watches legacies \
looking back, he learns \ still and loses his gloried skies.

WHISPERS FROM ENOCH

Nicholas Alti

If I'm deciphering a shy tongue
meant for angels, practicing *beg thee*

with human wheezes but a philosophy
less interpretation-friendly

than the language I have now to propose
my lack, display my own negative

lie confessions worse than the sin,
the prophecy I need will form

and the impact collapses a chest,
and the more profane my body

the less is considered wrong.

YOUNG HESTIA

Mahaila Smith

She had always had a habit of eating fire.
Sucking up the candle flames at the end of the night
craving beeswax night caps
or tasting the flames of oak and pine burning
in her father's library fireplace.
When the fire tickles her dry throat
she feels revived, stronger, her fingernail tips blacken.
She picks a red leather book off the shelf and reads the inscription
To Melody, my heart. She turns the page, leaving black ashes
against the paper's edge.

CAOINEADH

Emily Slade



BEFORE THE IVORY THRONES

Charis Negley

The mortal's song of grief reached every ear in the domain of the deceased. Lyrics engulfed Orpheus' lips in a dense cloud of agony as he warbled the woes of his wedding day. Aiding his voice strummed a lyre, strings plucked by the fingers of a shattered soul.

Orpheus' feet dragged through the sulfurous terrain of the Underworld as he poured out every piece of himself in his music. Wraiths ceased their aimless wandering in the Fields of Asphodel to watch and listen. Never had they heard such a voice. There was such a deep beauty in it, the kind that could only be born in brokenness.

Without even knowing the road ahead or behind, Orpheus approached the palace of Hades himself, the only one who could

release Orpheus' wife to him.

Eurydice had been dead for days, and every hour widened the chasm that cleft Orpheus' heart. But he would have her back. One did not simply traipse into the Underworld while still alive. His godly talent had granted him entrance, pulling even Charon into a daze as he ferried Orpheus through the Styx.

Orpheus' throat burned as he continued to sing. He might've been walking for days, the way his body ached, but he knew not the passage of time anymore.

He sang of the warmth of Eurydice's touch, and what it had been like to fall in love with the loveliest girl in the world. He sang of his heart, and how Eurydice had taken half of it with her in her

BEFORE THE IVORY THRONES

Charis Negley

deathly descent. He sang of how it felt to weep until there were no tears left to weep, and how the agonized grief of love lost could never compare even to the tortures of Tartarus.

The palace of Hades rose in dark spires scraping the sky (or the Underworld's equivalent). Ragged stones jutted out from every crevice, and as Orpheus drew nearer, the air seemed to grow even danker.

There was no gate, no door, only a gaping entrance. The area around the structure was frighteningly empty, granting the King and his wife solitude. Orpheus' body shuddered in spite of himself.

No one stopped him as he stepped inside, and though his voice weakened and his strums slowed, his

song did not end. His feet, however, stuck to the floor as the entrance widened into a throne room.

Orpheus saw Their Majesties of the Underworld themselves seated upon their chairs of ivory.

Hades was the color of ashes left behind by a dying flame. His eyes still nursed the fire, delivering a piercing stare that threatened to stop Orpheus' feeble heart. The King's hair was gnarled and curled, the shade of brittle bone. And yet, not all of his facade was fierce. There was something imploring in the way he held his shoulders back.

Beside him sat Persephone. The Queen of the Underworld's skin was the color of earth, soil rich and warm. Her hair cascaded over her shoulders in pleats of vines. Her full lips were the color of pomegranates,

BEFORE THE IVORY THRONES

Charis Negley

an ironic reminder of how she came to be Hades' wife.

Orpheus' voice still warbled, heart aching from its split, as he told the story of his beloved.

As he sang, he watched Hades' veneer begin to crumble as his gaze turned to his wife. Something in the King's eyes changed, and his chapped lips drew back into a line. He held up his hand, pushing himself to his feet. "Stop."

His voice was both a whisper and a boom, and Orpheus' feet froze to the stone floor.

"I remember," he said, still looking at Persephone, who stared right back, her lips parting. "I remember what it is like to fall in love."

Orpheus knelt before them, shaking as his voice died off. He kept his forehead pressed to the cold stone until Hades said, "You may speak."

Orpheus lifted his head. "King Hades, I have come to retrieve the soul of my wife."

Hades nodded slowly, like that was what he had expected to hear, but regretted it. "I know."

"She was stolen from me," Orpheus continued to plead. "There was a snake, and its dripping bite stole her on our wedding day. She was clad in yellow—" his voice broke off in a choked sob "—then clad in death."

Hades did not answer.

"Please," Orpheus begged, his heart

BEFORE THE IVORY THRONES

Charis Negley

twisting inside his chest.

“You will never know this grief. I only ask you in desperation. I need her back with me. I cannot live without Eurydice.” His eyes filled. “Let me bring her home.”

Hades sighed, fingers curling into fists. His shoulders slumped, and he lifted Persephone by her hand. “I must seek counsel,” he told Orpheus. “Wait here.”

The King and Queen retreated from the throne room. It was only then that Orpheus heard the snickers sounding from the far-left wall.

Three women with empty eye sockets and gaping, toothless smiles laughed with each other. They had stringy red hair and might’ve been

considered beautiful but for the empty orifices in their faces.

“What amuses you so?” Orpheus asked, clutching his lute to his chest.

Him acknowledging them only made the women cackle harder. One’s hand went to her mouth, where she stuck in a small, white object. A tooth.

“Do you underthtand the predicament you’ve wedged King Hadeth into?” she asked, speaking through a lisp.

“No,” Orpheus answered softly.

Their voices rose into howls of laughter once more. Another woman snatched the tooth from the first, also popping a single eyeball into her right socket. “He cannot let your

BEFORE THE IVORY THRONES

Charis Negley

wife go! If he did, thome king that would make him! Mortalth die; they do not come back. He cannot break his own thythtem! The whole Underworld would run rampant! He would never thraighten up hith people again.”

Orpheus’ heart sank. He knew that, but Hades had gone to seek counsel for a reason. All could not be lost yet.

Her other sister yanked the tooth, issuing a cry from the second woman. The third shoved it into her own gum and began to speak.

“However,” she croaked, “the entire Underworld hath heard your thong of woe. If you do not get your wife back, the entire plathe will be in an uproar, too!”

”Then what will he choose?” asked Orpheus.

“He cannot!” the third laughed through her words. “Thith hath never happened before! He ith thtuck!”

Orpheus held his instrument closer, drawing in a breath. He didn’t have an affirmative answer, but he had not been sent away, either. He had a chance. A prayer flew to his tongue, but he stopped soon after he began murmuring, wondering if any god would hear him in this realm and grant his wish.

So, he spoke directly to his wife instead.

“Eurydice.” Her name cracked in his throat. “Song of my lips and love

BEFORE THE IVORY THRONES

Charis Negley

of my soul, hear my cry. Come back to me.”

“Orpheus?”

Orpheus drew in a sharp intake of breath, then laughed in a broken tone. His mind had conjured her perfectly, her voice exactly as he remembered. For the first time since Eurydice had died, she felt near.

“Eurydice,” he repeated, her name a quavered song leaping from his tongue. “Eurydice, Eurydice.” The syllables were careful, rolling off his lips. He had always found her name so beautiful. “I’m almost to you, my love.”

“You’ve come,” her voice responded, breaking through her words. “You’re here.”

“Almost,” he promised. “I—”

He looked up, and his heart slammed against his ribs. Not ten strides away stood Eurydice. She was paler than death, to the extent that Orpheus could see straight through her, but there was no doubt in his mind that it was his wife standing before him.

Orpheus pushed himself to his feet, his lute falling to the floor with a woody, hollow thud that sent an off-key chord through its strings.

“I heard your song,” Eurydice whispered, and spectral tears began to drip down her full cheeks. “I think the entire Underworld did.”

“Eurydice!” Orpheus ran to her, arms outstretched, but to his dismay, when he reached for his wife, his

BEFORE THE IVORY THRONES

Charis Negley

hands passed right through her. “No, no!”

“It’s all right,” she assured him, voice shaking through her tears. She bowed her head to hide them, strands of long, dark hair obscuring her face. “I’m right here, I promise, Orpheus.”

“I lost you.” His hands, desperate for something to grab onto, lifted to his curly hair, grasping fistfuls.

“I know,” she said, hands clasped to calm their trembling. “I’m so sorry.”

Orpheus dragged in a long breath, replacing his grief with surety. “I’m bringing you back home with me.”

Eurydice’s head shot up, her eyes wide. “Is that possible?”

A new voice sounded from the door. “Why else would we have summoned you, child?”

Orpheus and Eurydice turned to see Persephone in all her majesty.

Together, the living boy and the dead girl fell to their knees before the eternal Queen.

“My husband is not certain,” Persephone continued, “but he ponders the young mortal’s request.”

She looked between the two, her expression filling with pity.

“Whatever he decides, cherish these few moments you’ve been given now.” With that, she turned, her

BEFORE THE IVORY THRONES

Charis Negley

cape of leaves billowing behind as she made her exit.

Orpheus' tears spilled. His wife's intangible hands wreathed his face in a hollow, chilly hold. From the spring he thought had run dry, Orpheus cried, his raw throat searing with the effort.

It felt like a short, blessed eternity, those moments he was granted with Eurydice's poor soul, but the time suddenly ended as the room plummeted in temperature upon Hades' return.

Orpheus stood back up straight, Eurydice standing bravely beside him. Orpheus' eyes still held a sheen of glass, but no tears fell anymore. He knew what he was here for, and if she was not granted to him, he would ask for the King of the

departed to take his life, too.

"May we go?" Orpheus asked, hating that his voice betrayed a small tremor.

Hades set his jaw. "On one condition."

Though fear flew through him, Orpheus' heart soared. He felt his hand go cold as Eurydice lay her ghostly hand over his.

"You will go ahead," Hades said in a low tone, "and I will send your wife a few steps behind you."

"That is all?" Orpheus asked, his voice barely making a sound.

"She will not be able to see you," the king continued. "She will follow by the sound of your voice only.

BEFORE THE IVORY THRONES

Charis Negley

Your voice was your passage down. It will be your passage out. Nothing else.”

Orpheus’ breath caught. He’d been singing for hours upon hours already. Every word now was like a slice to his throat. “Your Majesty... my voice will *die* before we ever leave.”

Hades’ cool demeanor sparked, lighting charred embers. “Did I ask for your contestation, *boy?*”

Orpheus ground his teeth, nodding. He understood how fortunate he was to have only received a reprimand for speaking back. “Forgive me, sire,” he rasped, feeling every word scrape.

“You must not look back before you get to the realm of the living,” Hades

continued. “Do so, and she will remain here for all eternity.”

Orpheus’ heart stuck in his throat, though he knew not why. He was getting what he had asked for, and at so cheap a price. “So... I will not know if she follows?”

“Trust that she does,” Persephone instructed, “and no tragedy shall befall you.”

Orpheus looked at his wife, utterly terrified. How could he trust them? The gods owed him nothing.

Perhaps this was all a cruel game, a trick they could laugh at the moment he left.

Eurydice stared back at him, confident, a plea in her gaze.

BEFORE THE IVORY THRONES

Charis Negley

“Eurydice,” he grieved, “I cannot. I can sing no more.”

She shook her head, cupping his cheek in her hand. “You can. You must. Let me be your voice. Sing only for me.”

Orpheus’ mind slowed enough for him to think clearly. If she had faith, so could he.

“Thank you, Your Majesties,” he told the King and Queen, kneeling once more and pressing his forehead to the floor. He stood again, gazing upon his beloved wife one last time.

“You will follow, my love? I cannot promise that...” Tears stung his eyes, and he was unable to go on.

Eurydice nodded, the touch of a smile gracing her young, sweet face.

“I believe you can do this, Orpheus.” Only the touch of a tremble marred her voice. “I will follow. To the end of the world, and even beyond that. Sing, and we shall live yet.”

THE SERMON OF LEPIDOPTERA

Clover O'Mordha

our possessor

clad in geode crystal

look at our hearth

our tassels

our martyr swelling with plum pulp
oxidized

flayed & vegetal on the mud throne

become harvest

become soot

become leach

draw blood—feel the vessels pulsate

she meanders through rapture

& cell

draped in amaranth & dried orange slice

the subterranean bone oracle

covered in lace & gauze

a gift full of heliotrope

bespeckled

peach-halve

re-dress the roots

re-clasp the petals

re-mesmerized by the delicate

THE SERMON OF LEPIDOPTERA

Clover O'Mordha

cherry red cheeks, slim
sexed, barely breasted

b

e

a

s

t

the bubbles in her cup look like morse code
& I wonder what they are saying to me
in the cemetery
I see the daughter
that wintry maid
granite-like
placating

tongue glistens with lust
saliva dripping
lip slip

throw stones in the fire
peel gems from our honeycombed deity
&
take
sweet honey from

THE SERMON OF LEPIDOPTERA

Clover O'Mordha

the sky & bless the
moth
er

sweet lipped hive minded
honey dipped static

blinded

stripped
bare
of
diseased
branches
and
burned
a
l
i
v
e

FIRST MOTHER

Val Drew

gaia, your children draw blood, brawl for the
crown, gaia, they devour their women as if they
were mulberries freshly plucked, and discard
them amongst mortals sinking in the bog, gaia,

liquor is their sport of choice, downing cup upon
cup upon glass upon bottle, entire evenings
wasted, gaia, these kin of yours are harlequins,
radiating in your sun, hexing your moon,

diminishing your service, instead using you
as an ultimatum, gaia, when they anger, when
they please, whenever, gaia, gaia, why do
you lay here enabling their playful sins?

isn't it time to show them true wreckage?
gaia, after these centuries, shouldn't you
show them how a real woman moves?

MIDSUMMER

Sophia Benito

We collect flowers from the fields
Cornflower, chickweed, fjällsippa
And place them under our pillow as
We dream of a lover's face on the
Mount of the golden queen

Sit as the old crone spins tales
Of mother trolls and mist that
Lure helpless maidens and sons
Of great men to fate unkind

Smiling to ourselves, looping wool
And weaving paper hearts
Her cries strike the abyss of our
Soft child mind —we knock
Hollow trees and pray for protection

Sanna, with curls of red, whispers
What are men to skogsrå and älva?

THE VIEW ON THE WAY TO CRETE

Sara Siepker

I once knew a Harpy who kissed
my neck with their beaked face
granules of teeth scraping skin as
they bit through the first layer. who
licked the blood before it could stain me
and asked if they could spend the night.

I once loved a Harpy who had such
beautiful feathers: gossimer and soft.
kissed me late at night on my familial
couch. kissed me in my car when I
drove her home. who kissed me even
after the Erinyes called us back.

and sometimes I am afraid
I have been more harpy than lover.
more familiar with the taste of salt,
crimson on soft skin, plumaged claws,
dying light--

have watched you die every day since because of it.

THE SPIRIT OF THE DEAD

Jenna Nesky

I turn in my sleep, once
for every star that flashes
 into the sky— a way of counting
 what I'm left with,
aside from the tremendous dark. If a star
dies, only in that instant do I lie
 perfectly still. It happens
 sometimes that spirits
collect around me: spirits of
dried rivers, of fallen leaves.
 In dreams I have asked
 these spirits questions,
though at first they say nothing—
waiting until I ask
 the final question
 to which death is the answer.

WHAT ATHENS LEFT BEHIND

Shauna McNamara

Rolled up
Crumpled
Scampering along the dusty path
In ones and twos

<And sometimes more>

Forcibly
Ripped from memory's pane
Trapped in the maze
Scrubbed of colour
Weakened with time

Those discarded
Flickering images
Of darkened eye corners
And tongues detached from the roofs they fled
To end up here

Eager warriors wind the paths
Dropping footprints in the sand
They sing their chants

<that won't appease the gods>

WHAT ATHENS LEFT BEHIND

Shauna McNamara

New songs that twist to shape their twisted morals
Sewn anew by bitter truths and lies
Sweet snow and empty promises

“This is for love, I do not hate”

They tell themselves the lie
Proud of their offerings
Envisioned compensation
For some imagined failure
With their abandoned forgotten at their backs

<a noble sacrifice>

Like the trail of a ball of yarn
That guides them back to empty homes

Pointless as the pleading prayers
Of the world's forgotten dregs
Hoping Hades looks on kindly
He is the last one left to beg

Hear me and see me
We beseech thee

WHAT ATHENS LEFT BEHIND

Shauna McNamara

Make me precious

Make me pure

Make me wanted

Echoes fading into darkness

<the sacrifice in vain>

In a maze of loss and pain

HATHOR

Emily Slade



THE DEATH BAT

Lily Hunger

We always listen for – and always fear – flapping wings in the night, barely loud enough to be caught by a human ear. By day he lurks down in the cenote, past the cavern, past the pool, and down into the underworld, where for sport his victims' heads are used in games grisly and cruel. But by night...Shhhhh, you mustn't speak once the light has dimmed. God of night, god of death, you'll miss the faint whisper on the wind. Clawing up and out into the world, he rises with the moon. Water dripping down a hairy back, he emerges from mesmerizing blue. Past the hanging vines and out into the open sky. Out, out into the hunt. Away, or near, he flies.

Deer, wolves, goats, and worse. None can escape Camazotz's curse. Not even Hunahpú and Xbalanqué, who failed their night in Zotzilaha and succumbed like all the rest. None can stand against Camazotz. Keep him from ripping your heart from your chest.

So, you see, we have no choice. I'll take an arm. And you, a leg. We pick someone so he doesn't pick us. We do what we must to keep the Death Bat fed.

Come, come, hold him down – a sacrifice to the hungry bat. My dagger cuts from neck to waist. May he lick up every drop of blood. May it sate the urge to seek out another taste.

A SCHOOL GIRL'S HELEN

Jordan Davidson

A man writes a Helen that wishes for death and yet I cannot help but wonder what if / what if she hungers for carnage / aching to see those who hurt her carrion for dogs and birds* / the hardness of bronze made meat of soft stomachs in the palms of battle scabbed hands / what if the mounds of corpses made her smile in vengeance paid not in full for her girlhood but paid back in kind / each man that burned fuel for smoke clotted pyres burned married to his lust / what if Aphrodite laid beauty on her sleeping frame as a weapon not a curse / gifts for Paris forgotten in bloodlust between red lips as any golden apple becomes an apple of strife if tossed hard enough / so keening a whispered battle cry Aphrodite screams avenge me / and Helen said yes YES / what if she grew up blazing and knew she was beautiful and never regretted through the fists of men and blackened eyes / each successive bruise midwifing her from humanity and to goddesshood / what if Helen's rage not Achilles brought such doom for so many sets of arms that falsely claimed her / with no man she would rest / at midnight she tears open the stones of Sparta to the gates of Troy / this terror of men a glorious recitation screamed full throated over the death ridden plains / she crows let your wreckage be my triumph / I have slaved so many nights for you / my body I reconquer from your throat / do not touch me / DO NOT TOUCH ME / I AM FREE ALONE / I AM WHOLE ALONE —

What if Helen ignited the walls of Ilium just to watch something burn?

*from Homer's Iliad

TO BEHOLD A LITTLE GOD

Cat Neshyba

Psyche was a beautiful girl. Much too beautiful, as it turned out.

Say she was a simple country girl. She was certainly naive, cloistered with her parents in their castle—they didn't let her go out much. They kept her in their castle in order to keep her innocent, and perhaps they thought this would keep her safe. But the gods love punishing the innocent, as much as they love punishing anyone else.

The thing is the gods get smaller as you get older, or maybe they get more powerful even as they seem increasingly stupid. As a child they were so wonderfully large. Now you just have to shake your head and say wow, the pettiness. The pettiness of Venus deciding, again, that this poor mortal girl is a threat to her celestial status.

Upon hearing the story for the first time, I had that natural reaction of a child, which was, why would she pick on someone who was clearly so innocent, to the point of possibly being kind of stupid? It's a scary story because of that, and maybe that's the point.

Venus instructs Cupid to shoot Psyche with his arrow while she's looking upon something conveniently ugly, a pig or something. But when Cupid sees Psyche, he's so distracted by her beauty that he accidentally pricks himself and falls in love with her, and now the dye has been cast: a little god has made a mistake, his mother is leaning over his shoulder, and a very beautiful girl is caught up in the middle.

It's the first important image of this

TO BEHOLD A LITTLE GOD

Cat Neshyba

story: Cupid looks upon the unconscious Psyche and loves her. It mirrors the same image later, when Psyche leans over sleeping Cupid, holding her lamp aloft. The lamp, like Cupid's bow: its arrows, the drops of wax, fall upon him and wound him. You can wound with a look, if it falls on one whose defenses are down. Even if they are a little god.

But first. Psyche's parents ask the oracle of Apollo what will become of their daughter, and the oracle tells them she will marry a monster. They must take her up to a cliff and cast her off of it to give her to him.

Being pious people, they say *okay, sure, we'll sacrifice our youngest and most beloved daughter to some mysterious and terrifying creature.*

It's unclear whether this is a wedding or a kind of forced suicide; they dress her in funereal clothing, and the procession that follows her is one of mourning. And she stands at the edge of a cliff, and then—she steps off of it. Psyche walks out into the abyssal unknown.

She is born up by the wind and taken to a beautiful clearing where there is a beautiful house filled with nice things. She's well-cared for, and at night, in the dark, someone she can't see comes and makes love to her.

(How did he touch her? Gently, it's said, but what did his hands feel like on her? It wasn't painful, we can presume—yet she wasn't carried away in it. Not yet. He has seen her, but she hasn't seen him. She bears his love as a dutiful wife, accepting

TO BEHOLD A LITTLE GOD

Cat Neshyba

herself as an object in his eyes, the eyes of a husband who might be a monster. And who knows what that little god might look like, in the dark? Oracles, after all, are not known to lie.)

Psyche's been dumped off the cliff out into a world unknown, but she's still in the dark, kept coddled and safe and blind. And I suppose this happens over and over again: Psyche opens her eyes and falls, and then she falls more, and then she falls yet more, until she's all the way in the underworld. But that is later. For now, even though she's already been thrust into the unknown, she still must choose to see it.

Her sisters, whom Cupid has allowed to visit her, convince her to do it. They want her to look upon the monster that's been taking her in

the night. She doesn't act out of fear, I don't think, nor does she do it out of love. No, I think she looks with the curiosity of a child, or a fool. She looks upon love the moment she draws back the curtain and holds the lamp over his prone figure, his angelic face, as if gazing off the edge of a great precipice.

Cupid awakes to those bright drops of oil on his skin, hot and searing. He looks up at his wife, now awake, alive to him and to herself, gazing at him with the first true stirrings of desire she's ever felt. And he feels a great sense of fear, of foreboding. He feels a deepening in the pit of his stomach. He knows the moment: he knows that now, everything changes.

The rest of the story, well, it happens. Cupid runs away to his

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mother, and Psyche, heartbroken, runs after him. She goes from goddess to goddess and none can give her aid, until the ants and the reeds and a tower help her. She goes all the way to the underworld and back, and having finally proved herself, she is reunited with Cupid, released from his mother's bonds. There is the final marriage, there is Psyche's ascent to divinity.

But all of that, for me, turns on the image of her leaning over him with her lamp. The moment of reversal, the shifting of the object, a young woman realizing the power of her own potent gaze. For her—the thrill, the drop, the sensation of falling as you lay eyes on your lover as if for the first time. For him, the pain, the desperation, the fear of being seen—and what compares to that knowing

sight, sliding over you like hot oil on skin?

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Emily Slade is a senior at Towson High School and attending William and Mary in the fall. She has loved having the opportunity to take painting and sculpture classes throughout high school and plans to continue during college.

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Aditi Nair is an Indian writer constantly moving between India and UAE like a masochistic ping-pong ball. She loves stories of all kinds and has an eighteen-year-old fascination for chocolates. If she isn't hunching over her laptop, you can find her staring into the distance and mourning the commonality of her name.

Nicholas Alt has high hopes; don't let the mood disorder or brain damage fool you. Of rural Michigan descent, he was an Associate Editor for Black Warrior Review in Alabama and now lives in Atlanta. More poems haunt DIAGRAM, Poet Lore, JMWW, Frigg Magazine, and DREGINALD. Hail yourself, please.

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Cat Neshyba is a writer in Portland, Oregon. A lot of what they get done, they get done in a panicked frenzy. They are obsessed with the uncanny, ghost stories, and queer and trans love stories. They host the Credo Quia Absurdum podcast (@cqapod on Instagram) with their sister, where they delight in talking about dumb things in smart ways and smart things in dumb ways.

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