



*Fairy Tale Review*  
THE  
WEB ISSUE





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Mihaela Buna graduated from The West University of Timisoara, Romania, in 2004 with a bachelor's degree paper on modern and post-modern fairytales. Nowadays, she works as a copywriter, online writer, translator and book reviewer and she's the proud owner of a smelly dog.

*Reading or writing fairytales isn't about refusing to grow up or about living in the past. It's all about bringing magic and playful wonder into our blasé present. A fairytale could keep us moon-eyed in a world where faking an orgasm is easier than rediscovering a genuine sense of wonder towards the miraculous potential of everything that happens to us on a daily basis.*

## *Acid Washed*

*Little Red Riding Hood's Attempt to Lead a Normal Life*

The morning light was tickling the blinds and the dribble on her chin shone. She thought she could escape from that fresh limelight. She believed that she could use her bed sheets to design a soft sequel of dreams. But they did not agree on that. They were too stubborn and pushed her out of her nighttime and fat-free journey—the final stopping place before a new day grabbed her. She fancied herself leaving parts of her body in bed and using just the ones that could help her make it through the day. “Mid could take care of them.” “Mid could babysit them and tell them stories about me,” she thought.

But Mid had been missing for days. She could no longer see the traces that proved Mid was already awake, sipping from a warm fantasy and discussing its brume with her. Those days, she became a real pathfinder, smelling the bourgeois air and talking to the blue elephants on the wallpaper, asking questions and threatening to tear them unless they forgot about their crazy idea of moving to her neighbor’s wallpaper. She could take care of them. She could glue them back where they belonged because her room was the perfect playground for them. “My neighbor’s wallpaper is just a cemetery for you!” she used to threaten, but now the blue elephants knew better.

She was already late for school. But she did not want to skip an extra-virgin breakfast. It was her favorite moment of the day and she used to spend it with Mid. They would laugh and tease each other; splash tea on the walls and pretend it was the tea’s wish to end up on the greasy crockery. But that morning was different and boredom had already

bitten her toes and ruffled her bangs. Soon she was out of bed, baffled and covering her eyes, trying to persuade Mid to enter their magical playground and have breakfast with her. But today she was all alone. Her imagination was too tired to reconstruct the ordinary morning shades that made her believe that she was different from her own-age peers. The breakfast tasted as nutty as a mohair smoothie: irritating her tongue and making her teeth coarse. Entering the bathroom, she remembered that time was not on her side and she had to rush and catch the school bus to her eighth grade class. She was noisy and moody as she got dressed and left her room, feeling as if school were her biggest enemy.

But someone was careful to close the door behind her. She didn't have the time to notice, but her room was already permeated by a warm presence. It wasn't her harsh odor. It wasn't her animal warmth. It wasn't an allusion of the rollercoaster made of her bones and muscles. No. It was more than that. A belated guest was there for his daily breakfast: dried dates and milk. His ancestors were keen on eating sweet and white-fleshed knights who lost their way, coming back from brutish crusades for betting gods that bit their nails when not pleased with the gains. But he could not remember the taste of their flesh. All he could remember was that he could use their imaginations in order to become extra scaled. Their atrocity was the perfect fuel for him to use to get a bonus for his own skin; human fear was the perfect designer that could add new shapes to every sort of reality. But she was not like that. She hadn't allured him with her fear or anxiety. Instead she had baited him with her curiosity and unfinished imagination...he could find a genuine cradle in her roaming thoughts.

The moment her dreams allowed him to shape and reinvent his old body, Mid knew that his ancient breakfast had already become a myth or a simple fairytale for the naughty children. He dwelled in

her imagination without scratching it with its claws. Mid was the most pleasant trespasser she could ever dream of. The girl had charmed him with her needy soul, one that couldn't be admitted when strangers were invited to have dinner in her parent's house. She used to mold her imaginative patterns and create new friends that didn't want her to be perfect. The dress code of such bogus beings was the Sunday uniform, and they used to wear it whenever she felt alone and insecure. Seeing them made her more comfortable with herself...they were ergonomic friends that know how to help her with the homework and how to caress her face when the cold outside defied her woolen muffle.

"Are you still there?" asked the woman, worrying that her child was idling and pampering herself right inside the cotton-made shelter. But she received no answer. Mid knew that he had no reason to stay still and keep his breath. Humans were quite insensitive to fanciful mouths because such mouths didn't smell bad to them. She liked the way his mouth smelled...that smell reminded her of the wet leaves her grandma used to trail whenever the harsh rain ravaged the courtyard. But she couldn't remember her grandma's face. It was as if her face washed away every time she tried to remember its rugged features. The only thing that she could remember about her was that she allowed her to play all day long with children who thought that she was coming from another space...a strange space that didn't look like an ordinary country. She loved to feel that she was a sort of foreign being without having a clue that loneliness could come as easy as peanut butter on a cracker. That was the world Mid entered, using his tail in order to make room for extra chatters that didn't match the flavorless reality.

The girl had welcomed him and they had been best friends ever since the day she started to create his shapes by thinking about all the fairytales that she had read. She wanted him to be colorful; she wanted him to be her own rainbow dragon but her imagination ran

out of colors. Luckily Mid turned out to be a green dragon that was stubborn enough to learn how to ignore the girl who pretended that she was his underage chatelaine. He knew how to deal with angry knights who mistook him for a horse; he knew how to trick young princes into believing that his mouth was the perfect refuge. But he didn't know anything about playing with hazelnut eyes and trembling hands. She drew his bogus contours well, but she failed to admit that Mid was not the imaginary pet she'd expected him to be. Echoing her own needs was not enough to deliver an imaginary dragon that could speak and play with her as soon as no one else was in the room. She kept the secret as if Mid's life depended on it, not knowing that such imaginary friends eluded the grownups' questions and tricked the parents into thinking that nothing was amiss.

Actually, Mid was able to morph his body and become a part of the furniture. For instance, he could transform himself into an art deco night light that collapsed out of shame as soon as the grownups started to make love. Although he preferred minimal decorations and retro pieces of furniture that sighed at parents too sensual to wear condoms, Mid was always keen on regaining his natural shape afterwards. He did that as soon as he was alone with the girl; she loved his upgraded shape that overwhelmed her greatest desires. She felt that she had the best friend in the world. It didn't matter that Mid only dwelled in her intricate imagination. That was enough to deal with the daily boredom of having to act as if the scenario had already been written for her. She liked some diversion, and Mid was genuine proof that she had managed to extend her imaginary kingdom.

The day Mid appeared, she was too sleepy to understand that a fantastic creature had disrupted her daily routine, and she was already used to the red dragon visiting her every month. Mid was there, in her room, wagging a tail that every woman obsessed with Feng Shui would



use in order to get rid of her ex's yang. He was perfectly aware that his days there were about to end because the girl had started to mistrust his dragonish skills. She didn't seem to need him anymore...she now preferred to hang around with her real friends who had no reptilian traits. But he wasn't ready to go yet. Instead, he played tricks on her mum because that poor woman had no idea that her beloved flat had already been transformed into a mansion that had neighbors roaming around instead of ancient river dragons that prowled, guarding the château from curious intruders who mistook the place for a lost paradise that sheltered yummy virgins who believed that chastity belts were medieval torments. Mid was the flat fool.

But her mum knew nothing about that. She didn't sense his presence. She noticed that she was running out of milk faster than ever...but she didn't presume that a dragon was the dairy lover who preferred dried dates instead of human flesh. In fact, she didn't have time to notice anything...even her daughter's face seemed to be a sort of scissor cut from an old postcard. When she remembered to kiss her, her lips felt the girl's sharpness, a sharpness that set her teeth on edge, as if her daughter's face was made of dusty pores that turned their back on her. It was the same girl she watched running to catch the school bus every day, trying to convince herself that school was more than a boring activity. It was the same girl who loved the days when her mum's best friend was sent to pick her up from her noisy school group and drive her home in a fancy car. She felt the peppermint nausea creeping into her school uniform as soon as she sensed the leather car seats dying beneath her. Actually, she could imagine the way the animals didn't agree on letting their skin go, starting flash mobs and protesting against the grim hunters who used their knives to cut bloody puzzle pieces.

Looking at the fine leather car seats made her sick and she threw up every time she could without even bothering to tell the driver about the

mushy performance that was about to take place. At first, the woman tried to predict the exact moment when the girl was about to puke. But she wasn't good at that. The only thing that she could do was to stop the car and let the girl take a fresh breath of air before going any further. She failed to understand that the car seats were the genuine triggers that transformed the girl into a silent and patient bystander. The girl's mother felt that the friend worried too much. The girl behaved normally except for the moments when she was puking on the woman's expensive car seats. But the girl's mum did worry that her daughter had no friends her own age, being as she was too absorbed in imaginary cocoons that shared the same dining space with real people. "The only moment when I can talk to her is during meal time! And our points are not easy to digest at all!" she used to tell her friend, hoping that her friend could understand why she needed her to drive her daughter back from school. She hoped that her friend could transfuse some bits of reality to her daughter. But her friend knew that all she could do was drive the strange girl back home and hope that her car would not be aggressed by some stinky half-digested leftovers. Her senses were offended each time the girl didn't bother to open the car window or make her pull over in order to go outside.

She watched her in the rear-view mirror...she watched the way her vomit crayoned strange shapes on her car windows, thinking that the driver's guide hadn't taught her how not to induce vomiting in passengers. Sometimes, she joined that awkward playground and tried to interpret the content of the girl's stomach, staring at the strange shapes that started to solidify on the car windows. Sometimes, she believed she could see a dragonish shape made of cereals and raisins...she even recognized a rainbow tail when scrubbing the car window, trying to detach that nonconformist piece of digestive art from the car she was

selling her soul for. Sometimes, she regretted not having children of her own.

Today, however, the girl didn't wait for her mum's friend to come and pick her up. Instead, she skipped the last classes and cradled her molecules in the rubber swing she discovered years ago. The swing was dissembled to look like a sort of domestic tool. People used the swing to hang their clothes outside to dry, but she understood its secret purpose: the rubber swing was waiting for her to reorganize her molecules and make them look like something else.

The enrapturing movements of the swing mixed her cells into a brand new cocktail that refreshed her effervescent senses, preparing her for the new days to come. She reconstructed and converted her lines, moods and eye blinks...she updated her imaginary friend Mid with colorful thoughts because the old dragon seemed so tired those days.... She didn't want to lose him, but she feared that her imagination was not enough to feed the marvelously convivial creature. She didn't know anything about dragons until Mid explained to her that dragons were allergic to veterinarians and their vaccines. The only inoculators these creatures accepted were the people who had created them through hard work and fanciful gestures. Saucy gestures were preferred as well, because a dragon loved to remember that he had been a tiny lizard before transforming himself into a fierce creature, haunting men for pleasure only.

Dragons reserved the right to choose their human buddies once they decided it was high time for them to become bogus pets. Every dragon had his own evolutionary path, a path that involved the constant searching for new forms to express their fabulous powers. One of the most expected challenges was to try and dwell in a child's imagination without interfering with his or her normal growth. Mid preferred this girl over others mainly because she knew how to play with her

imagination without forgetting to step back into real situations. It was quite dangerous for dragons to play with children who were too keen on mistaking their imaginary play for reality. But she was easy to talk to. She didn't overwhelm him with questions he was not willing to answer. Instead, she used his infinite power of understanding in order to share her innermost feelings and thoughts. Mid was always there except for the rainy days when he used the cranky nature outside and its naughty rain as a huge Laundromat.

"I can't remember the exact day when Mid woke me up and invited me to have breakfast with him," she thought, swaying and feeling comfortable with that rubber swing. Mid had stood right on the top of her bed...shyness was an UFO to him...an unknown "feeling" object for a creature that had no tail yet. She was not sure about the tail's length...she preferred to think about it a little more and come up with the right size and color. Meet the dragon designer!

"Hello there!" Mid had said, sniffing the girl's hair, tickling her with his meaty barbs and not knowing what to do next. He was not yet familiar with the way human language sounded. All he could remember was the meaningless noise people used to produce when arguing, fighting or making love. But those reminiscences were quite useless in a child's room, surrounded by toys and paper lantern figurines. He had to try new words, more childish and playful ones, because the old groaning and mumbling would have scared away that pair of green eyes that watched him out of curiosity. "I'm Mid the Third, and no historian has said something about me yet," the dragon had told her. "I'm the third offspring in a family that derives from happy garden lizards...my ancestors applied for entry-level positions as dragons and they managed to enter this special field," Mid continued, hoping that the girl would not see him as a possible threat.

It was the first time he had interacted with a human being without wondering about his or her taste. His ancestors had been happy to be free-roaming lizards, eating raw green leafy vegetables and fresh flies. But as some of them grew larger and larger, they had to come up with a plan as people began to see them as real threats to safety. They weren't seen as nice lizards anymore. Instead, the lords had started to put these huge lizards on their newly painted and dried walls...but as their walls were not large enough; they used only the lizards' heads and hung them there in order to impress their blonde mistresses. Mid escaped those dreadful times. Instead, he focused on becoming a genuine motivational motif in people's legends and myths. Once in a while, he stretched his tail and feet by searching rich complexes of human proteins to satisfy his ancient hunger. That low-carb diet worked wonders for his flaky skin and he indulged in this regular feast as if his dragon's days were about to end. But the girl whose bed Mid had invaded didn't know all these details...she only knew that the dragon standing in front of her had no problem with the size of her room. She was careful enough to use only the exact amount of imagination needed in order to create a dragon that could fit her room without scratching the walls or blocking the door. This imaginary creature was everything she wanted, but she hadn't expected it to appear so soon. At least, she hadn't expected the dragon to come up with his own name...she would have taken great pleasure in searching for a name that could remind her of all the efforts she had made in order to mold her new friend.

Thinking about all these old memories, she almost forgot that she had to go home and focus on finding another excuse for her mum. Her mum was worried sick when her friend phoned and told her that she hadn't found her daughter waiting for her in front of the school building. She already knew the exact words her mum would use in order to scold her... she was immune to them...still, she found genuine pleasure in making


up facts and serving them with hot sauce. She jumped off the swing and started running because it was already late. The afternoon air was chilly enough to remind her that she had forgotten her sweater at school. As she felt goose bumps forming on her skin, she frowned and wondered if this was how Mid's skin felt. The last days had caused a burning and awkward sensation in her stomach. She'd noticed that Mid's tail had started to lose its vividly green colors. The white discoloration worried her especially, because she didn't know anything about its cause.

When she'd first noticed these white spots, she'd paid a visit to the local vet; she didn't realize that even the most advanced veterinary studies were useless when the patient was a bogus being. Inside in the vet's waiting room, she wondered if Mid was about to leave her because she'd ignored him for days. If it hadn't been for that awkward discoloration, she would have continued to ignore him.

"Growing up is becoming more and more demanding," the girl thought, not knowing that bogus dragons were fragile and egocentric enough to believe that they were the centre of the world. "Mid is pretty selfish if he thinks that he can arrest my attention for good...faking a disease is the last thing he should do..." But her stream of thoughts was interrupted by the vet's assistant.

"Are you here for the disinfectant pill? You should have brought your pet over...how much does it weigh?" She had to admit that she hadn't a clue about why she was there, staring at the assistant's dull face and thinking that Mid was everything but an ordinary pet you can tame just to keep your soul warm. "I cannot tame a dragon. I cannot tame my imagination" she thought, running away from the scary nurse. Once she arrived home, she rushed into her room, hoping that Mid was still there. But all she could see was a tiny jade dragon placed on her bedside table. The green jade had white spots.





Jennifer Juneau, a National Poetry Series Finalist, has work in *American Poetry Journal*, *Cimarron Review*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Seattle Review*, *Verse Daily*, and elsewhere. The recipient of two prizes from the California State Poetry Society, she lives and writes in Switzerland.

*While reading fairy tales as a child, I was bored by the cherubic maiden who won the heart of the prince at the end of each story. Instead, I was intrigued by evil stepmothers and disgruntled queens and fairies. To me, they were the pulse of each tale. Now, as a poet, I have written a chapbook of adult fairy tales celebrating women and their liberation from any 'prince charming'. "A Historical Tale," about a girl's horrific brush with reality, took a darker turn, and was written a couple of years ago after I returned from a trip to Dachau, Germany.*




JENNIFER JUNEAU

## *A Historical Tale*

Red-cloaked and hooded she by forest and the nimbus route, of desperately want to at last learn the naked bunk and stomp of black boot truth not alone by textbook rote, but a thud- a thud- a thud-, to what in a nightmare became Großmutter's house and died there. Indenturing Northwest by rail searing, she, basket-heavy with Lebkuchen and a sweet reserve unlike they so f-f-fearfully did from a chill and from the town of Großmutter. Steel runners ground the barren train, white-washed defilement free. Und, schrieb she to the belovedly de-ported, O Liebe Großmutter—blik, blik, blik. Shunting and the track *g-g-grinding, d-d-deafening* of master circumvolution, its engine carried her the border across. She is yet to gaze freedom looming over-the-horizon (for her) und wiederschreiben—blik, blik, blik. Gears shift to a deadstop, and what clumsiness through muck-and-slush the notebook sank, that is to say her journal fell, quagmire drunk—you can have none—and papers par-wet and nimbly strewn. Alone strode she basket-carrying tightly, down narrow path, shoe wet and worn, squelching to meet the companion of death of ghosts of brick of tar, char and char, billowy stack laden-smoke and yellow besides. All oven empty, mouths agape but fatal pictures in weiss und schwarz, and, my what bones, or what my bones, but all bones make dust. Exterminate by-way-of kiln. Shone the hayfield and oilcakes littered, but not too soon and schrieb she—blik, blik, blik, (tending to scribble there and here and here the hayfield) but, where are the animals? asked she, the animals were missing like—like gold missings from teeth! and—what big teeth has the gate! all

barbed-and-wire, spiny fangs of rust and fell gnarled against each other twist and snarl of epidermal matter attempt escapement and bulleted or quik to swallow. Nearby, a marsh! und march schnell und mach schnell! und schneller! All mold and musty save the incense now-and-then of gathering wind its savor of forget-me-not not rare since last NeunzehnHundertFünfUndVierzig and wake from gunshotshock und other nightmares in form of unfathomable Folterung and the march and the march no (in record) time to stop! Breathless she continues to write right behind the rifle range. Blik, blik, blik, schrieb she. How high the guard tower and then some. Time to go and a-tug she could not cry out this tug and the tug and the tug and the jerk is a tug, a tug is a boat, a boat goes on water and such is nature and so forth is beautiful except for here. Nothing but gravel and grit and the lingering soul of Großmutter and forget-me-nots, remember? and the screech awaited the forthcoming girl in the station of locomotive thunder under flotage and dense the bog and caught her foot and she woke next to the corpse of the train, indelible and its face. Ignorant no longer and basket carrying she, all red-cloaked and hoodly yet all tears and what could her matter be? mein Gott, sagte she, and *there* was hell. And *there* is *here*. She'd collapse the seat, below she'd sunk to and die eyes wide. If she could die could she? Why and why then? and continued to write—blik, blik, blik, so she (& you) will never forget.





Sara Levine's fiction has appeared in *Nerve*, *The Iowa Review*, *Caketrain* and other magazines. Her essays are anthologized in *Best of Fence: The First Nine Years* and *The Touchstone Anthology of Contemporary Creative Nonfiction*. Her prose poems can be found lying on the carpet. She chairs the Writing Program at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago.

*I read fairy tales for consolation. During a particularly trying time, which strangely enough corresponded with graduate school, I reveled in tales in which princesses are betrayed and wasted away, peasants whipped and led through burning hoops, rabbits—well-mannered but obviously controlling—mercilessly deserted by human brides. In my favorite, a witch turned a girl into a log and threw her into the fire.*

Dana De Ano's dimensional drawings on paper are meandering walks through childhood metaphors. Images pulled from an array of nostalgic paper findings are cut, painted, glued, and stitched. Quite often hybrid, stunted animals and people interact in a world of obstacles and drift in vast landscape-like expanses. The disturbing vignettes address a storyteller's folklore in an arbitrary way. A myriad of interpretations are invited through these drawn stories.

*I guess it all began with "The Mouse, the Bird and the Sausage," and continues to make me wonder...*

*Before She Was Red, She Was Blue,  
and Before She Was Blue,  
She Had a Name They Didn't Remember*

Nobody doted on her. Her father was dead, and her mother was sick. She was the plainest girl in her village and hopeless at the things that made girls endearing. Dishes broke in her hands. Butter didn't churn. Always she had to be reminded to fetch firewood and to feed the chickens. When she sang, her song was like the clank of a chain, or a door banging open and shut in the wind. "What awfully sad songs you sing," her mother said, and the girl said, "The better to soothe myself." So they called her Blue. She never skipped, only dragged her feet, and she refused to comb her hair or wear a stitch of colored thread in her apron. In fact, she wore so much black that when she was fourteen, her mother said, "You could stand to wear some color," and made her a cloak of samite. But the cloak was the color of blood and the other girls taunted her for it. Red Hood, Red Hood, they called her.

"I wish you'd made me a black cloak of broadcloth."

"Do you know what samite costs?" her mother said. "I had to ask your grandmother for the money to buy it. Here, take this loaf of bread and carry it to her house. But don't stay long with the old woman, and don't sing on the way, or you'll draw wolves." She wrapped the red cloak around her daughter's black shoulders and shunted her out of the house. "And don't touch it!" she called out after her. The cloak had a black lining. "Reverse that cloak and I'll whip your behind!"

"I hate you!" Blue cried as she stumbled into the forest, and she had hardly gone three steps when she pulled the cloth off the basket and gobbled up the loaf of bread her mother had intended for her

grandmother. When there was nothing in the basket but crumbs, she sat on a stump and wept. The stump was covered with moss, and the moss, enlivened by the falling drops of her tears, stirred, which in turn woke up the stump.

“Why are you crying?” the stump asked.

“I’ve had a fight with my mother,” Blue said. “She never trusts me to do what she says, so I got angry and ate all the bread she told me to take to my grandmother’s.”

“So you’re the girl whose mother is a mean-hearted woman!” the stump said.

“She’s not so bad,” Blue said, surprised that the stump knew something about her. “I’m clumsy, you see. And she’s sick. My father died when I was born and ... ”

“Oh, that old rubbish. I’m older than the trees, you know. I used to be a tree, and I know all about your parents, especially your father, because when he was a young man, he used to hang about these woods. He didn’t die when you were born. He ran off when you were still in your mother’s belly.”

“But she said ... and my grandmother said ... ”

“Well, they lied to you. I can see there’s a lot you’ve been missing. For instance ... ” the stump was warming to its subject “ ... ever wonder why the two women hardly visit with each other? Always sending you to carry things back and forth? Too sick and old to walk across the woods, my roots! I remember when your grandmother called your mother a slut. Before you were born.”

“Is that true?”

“They use you as a go-between because they can hardly stand to be in the same cottage.”

Blue stood up and examined the stump closely. “Are you a fairy?”







“No. Just a stump who thought you could use a truthful word. And now that you’ve had it, here’s another word of advice. Soon it will be dark and then the hour when wolves come out. So dry your tears and go to your grandmother’s house. She won’t be glad to see you, but never mind. You still have an errand.”

Blue began to cry again. “But my grandmother will beat me if I bring her an empty basket.”

“That’s true,” the stump said and was quiet for a while. “Well, I am covered with moss, more than I need. Fill the basket with moss and maybe your grandmother won’t notice the difference.”

Now this was a stupid plan, but stumps are not known for their genius, and neither are desperate girls of fourteen, so Blue began to rip handfuls of moss off the stump, and enthusiastically filled the basket. Soon she was feeling not exactly cheerful, but that it was possible to go on.

“Goodbye,” she told the stump. “Wish me luck. If my grandmother doesn’t beat me, my mother probably will.”

“I know your mother’s temper. Who do you think it was who chopped me down one day? But I’ll save that story for another visit.”

Blue bade the stump goodbye and off she went with the moss, which all this while had been listening, with quiet fury, to the conversation. As soon as Blue had gone three paces, the moss began to creep about, and soon it had pushed open the basket lid and landed with a jump on her arm.

“Oh,” said Blue, surprised that the moss had enough wits about it to move.

“You little bitch,” said the moss. “Next time you go ripping somebody off a stump, you might think first to ask.”

“The stump said I could borrow you.”

“And what does a stump know about me? Do you trust every rotting piece of wood you meet in the forest?”

“No, but I ... ”

“Why any decent moss should help a great big bully like you ... ”

“I’m not that big ... ”

“They say when you sing it sounds like a seam ripping. Or a frog at the bottom of the well. Stupid! Mean! And if it’s true about your mother, you’ll end up a slut too.”

“Shut up!” said Blue. She didn’t want to be called names anymore, not by anybody. “You’re supposed to be a loaf of bread!” She grabbed the moss and pinched it tightly until it lay quiet. Then she put it back in the basket and hurried towards her grandmother’s house. As she walked, she sang, and her rasping voice scattered the butterflies, silenced the birds, and drew the Wolf out of the shadows. He shambled along between the trees, keeping pace with her.

“Where are you going, Little Red Cloak?” he asked at last in a friendly tone.

“The cloak is red, but my name is Blue. I’m going to my grandmother’s house to deliver a loaf of bread.”

“With crumbs all over your dress? And a basket of creeping moss? That won’t take the lady in ... unless she’s blind, of course.”

“Oh!” said Blue, surprised that the Wolf had understood her deceit so quickly. “I suppose it was a bad idea, but I ate the bread my mother baked, and my grandmother will be angry. And even now I ought to be hurrying, for I promised my mother and the stump that I would get home before dark.”

“How odd,” the Wolf said slowly, “that anyone should mind the dark.”

“They say the dark is the wolves’ hour,” Blue said, and looking on his open face, she laughed. The Wolf laughed too. Then he said gently, “I think I’ve heard of your mother. She unlaces her bodice for all the wandering woodsmen?”



“No, I’m sure you are thinking of someone else.”

“I suppose I am,” said the Wolf. He knew men went to the woman’s door when the girl was out on errands. “Well,” he went on, “I’m sorry your family grudges you a loaf of bread. I’m sure you only ate it because you were hungry.”

“Tell me,” said Blue, who had begun to think the Wolf very clever, “if I hide a stone in the basket and run away before my grandmother opens it ... would that fool her, do you think? Goodness knows, my mother’s bread is as heavy as a stone.”

The Wolf laughed. Feisty, he thought. Odd, lonesome, sullen creature and still a bit of the snarl in her.

“Why don’t you hide me in the basket?”

“Because then you will leap out and eat my grandmother.”

“That’s true,” the Wolf said, helping her put a stone in the basket. He didn’t want to leave her side, and Blue didn’t want to leave his either, so they walked on together in the forest, and the Wolf never stopped arguing that she should let him into her basket. At last they broke off talking and Blue began to sing in her sad, grating voice, which the Wolf answered with a raucous howl. Then all the little creatures of the forest ran from them, and they stepped off the path into the darkest part of forest, and Blue threw off her cloak and let it fall in the thorns. The Wolf smelled of ash and blood and meat and by the time they returned to the path, Blue had all but promised herself to him.

“There is no love between you,” he said as they came to the grandmother’s door. “I will climb into the basket now and when she lifts the latch ... ”

But Blue kissed the Wolf and said, “Do what you will, I will be waiting by the mill.” Then she hid while the Wolf opened the latch of the grandmother’s house and went in and ate her. And when he came back out, he put the bones in the basket with the stones and the moss

and showed her. The shining bones of her grandmother danced in the basket. “Slut,” said the jawbone, and the Wolf took out the jawbone and threw it away.

Meanwhile Blue’s mother went with a party of men to look for her. The woodsmen searched all over and at last they found the red cloak, dirty and torn. Blue saw their lanterns moving in the woods and heard her mother say, “If I find her alive I will beat her. If I find her dead, I’ll be glad because she was useless every day of her life.” “What was that?” said Blue. But the Wolf said, “Only the wind in the trees.” And when she went to sleep, the Wolf went to the mother’s house, leaped on her and ate her up too, and brought back the bones in the willow basket. There had been a man in bed with her whom he ate too, but the Wolf didn’t tell Blue that; he had thrown the woodsman’s bones out.

“Are you sure these are my mother’s bones?” Blue asked.


“Of course, I’m sure.”

“That cloak was red samite,” the jawbone said.

“You see?” the Wolf said.

“A burden, a burden every day of my life,” the jawbone said. So the Wolf took the jawbone out of the basket and threw it away.

Then Blue lay about the den. She forgot to gather berries. Her hair matted into knots. She had to be reminded to fetch water. She cried and was as sad as ever and missed her mother. “Oh, my basket is heavy,” she told the Wolf, for she insisted on carrying it wherever she walked. Soon her belly too was heavy with babies. From the way she hung, it looked as if she would deliver a pack. “What was your name?” the Wolf asked her, trying not to show that he had grown tired of her. “What did they call you before they called you Blue?” “I can’t remember,” Blue said, and she railed at him for throwing away the women’s jawbones, for if he hadn’t, she said, she might have been able to ask.



Julia Drescher lives in Texas where she co-edits the online poetry journal *Little Red Leaves*, as well as Dos Press. Her recent or forthcoming work can be found in *The Colorado Review*, *P-Queue*, *Try*, *Packingtown Review*, & a chapbook from Ypolita Press.

*Fairy tales are positive monstrosities, open to various mutations/mutinies. In this way, they preserve what never was, what never will be again, or what will always be. Or, in other words, "We would be nothing without woods in which..."*

JULIA DRESCHER

from *Desultory Rider*

Woodcore

Practice crashes

Holding your breath

Knocked out

“on the ground”

Woodcore

Practice biting


Your own

Tongue

The dripping floor in

Your heart’s

Woodcore



Sierra Nelson is a co-founder of literary performance groups The Typing Explosion and the Vis-à-Vis Society, and helps edit the journal *Mare Nostrum*. Her collaborative chapbook with visual artist Loren Erdrich, *I Take Back the Sponge Cake*, is forthcoming from Q Ave Press. Nelson recently attended an artist residency at SÍM in Reykjavik, where she found the “hidden folk” tradition still very much alive.

*Reading a good fairy tale generates the same kind of excitement as recalling a vivid dream—the meaning gleaned not from one simple lesson learned, but from the strangeness of the details as they unfold and the strength (and surprise) of the encounter. My favorite kind of poems operate in a similar field of excitement. Although spoken in a different context, for me this statement by James Baldwin addresses this as well: “Although we do not wholly believe it yet, the interior life is a real life, and the intangible dreams of people have a tangible effect upon the world.”*




SIERRA NELSON

*For LRRH*

I.

Little was given. Red was given.  
Girl so given as to be unsaid.  
Riding was said but not given.  
Cheeks were given to crimson  
beneath a hood: hood was given.

Flowers convincing as wolves were gathered.  
The first choice, a good one, was bad.  
To stray. She does stray.  
A small foot given to a meadow.  
Shadows gathered in pools of delay.



Erica W. Adams is a 500-year-old witch living in the body of a 27 year old. She keeps a little record of her brain wanderings at [ericawadams.blogspot.com](http://ericawadams.blogspot.com).

*Fairy tales remain an exceptional medium because of their marginal nature—they inhabit the edge, the border—the frontier. Transformation happens in this liminal place & reminds us of the agency that can come from imagination. The acquisition of the symbolic (a slipper, a radish, a grandmother) suggests an incredible alternative to the commodification of objects, & in turn, opens the space of the possible.*

## *Swelling*

To be eaten means: to have intimate knowledge of. I told you, the wolf ate me, and what I meant was: the wolf loved me.

The body that enters the mouth of another is a sacrament. It is divine. I slipped in and heard, in my inner most ear, Grandmother's voice: "This is what happens when two become one."

A body is more of a body when it is consumed by a body.

I have these bones called slabs, and I write on them. I write the story of how I came to be born in another.

Watch the wolf's swelling: it is *tumulus*, tomb, mound.

The destruction of one thing is the birth of another.

## *Foundling*

I TAKE CARE OF THINGS.

Though I am not in uniform I wear my face like one. It gives me the seriousness that is necessary when entering into people's homes when they are away.

I do this because I am responsible. I wrote five hundred and thirty seven fliers in my best penmanship and placed them in mailboxes The fliers said:

DO YOU NEED THINGS TAKEN CARE OF? in big letters across the top because that is a good way to get someone's attention.

I waited by the phone and it rang. They gave me a key and I went into the house when they were gone.

They are away and I am to take care of the birds.

\*

I TAKE CARE OF THINGS.

I go to take care of the birds. There are seven cages, each hanging from a hook in the aviary. The truth is that there are no birds, only cages.

Infant is with the cages, big mouth revealing the room behind it. I am serious when I say that if you look through that opening you will see the earth underneath.

Infant's head is crumbling, and even though infant isn't speaking, infant is yawning and swallowing up space.

Yes, infant is more of a statue in the aviary. What I should call it is: Ossuary. The cages are more like decorations and they are made of bones. Infant goes crumbling.

When things crumble, it means they are falling apart. Not the cages, not infant, even though its head spills out something awful.

## *Volatile*

This illness has made me so tired.

As a child, I was thought to have a solid frame— sturdy, resistant. Digging my heels into the dirt I would imagine myself as a tree, rooted from the deepest part of the earth.

My body now: febrile, insistent. I have a nurse who cares for me— she came before the illness—right before. She brings me my meals on a silver tray with a decanter. Together we will admire the landscape painting on my wall; we will pretend that it is a window. How nice the trees look today, Nurse, I say, and she agrees.

Nurse smells of sulfur and her gown is always black.

\*

When sleep is your only true activity, certain things in your environment become important—essential, even.

Ruffled pillows need their fluffing! I say to Nurse.

I bring my face to my knees as she sets the tray down, begins to fix the pillows.

It is then I notice she looks different.

Nurse, have you changed your hair?

She has a way of conversing with me without speaking. Swish, Swish, goes her taffeta skirt against the floor as she moves around the bed.

\*

When you are ill, it is as if the days are all the same. I have nothing to gauge the seasons. I was put in this room by Nurse; I will leave this room by Nurse.

\*

Nurse comes in with a tray. My eyelids flutter. She sets the tray down on the table beside me. My nightgown has slipped off my shoulders, off of my body.

I can see her so well:

Her eyes are red. Her ears are large. And her teeth are sharp.

Oh how I feel so awake inside of her.

## *Reason of the Mouth*

After the accident there was nothing I could do to move her from the rocking chair. She sat there— day after day and night after night— rocking back and forth with eyes like two awful dishes, not speaking. Not listening. Only rocking.

I had tried performing various dances and comedies for her—tried covering myself in straw and moving about on the floor like an animated bale of hay, but this held no interest for her. Or, before cooking the fowl, I put my hand in the place the stuffing goes and mimicked flight, moving the bird in figure eights around the room. This only caused her to rock harder and harder in her chair, back and forth and back again. The wood of the floor had two deep grooves like wagon wheels in mud and I feared that if she did not stop rocking she would go into the ground, and never be seen again. And then I would have no one to talk to, no one at all.

\*

There is a woman who lives deep in the woods who can fix many things. She cannot bring the dead to life but she can bring life to life. I went to her and brought every last jar of preserves and jellies I had made for the winter. Even the rhubarb, which you can only gather using your thumb and pinky finger. The woman sniffed the jars and smiled, revealing a mouth as old as time, gums like the inside of a very deep cave. She



reached into her skirt and gave me a small brown bean, saying, Put this in a new box and cover it forty days with dung.

The bean went in a new box, and the box was covered in dung. The forty days part was the hardest; all I could do was watch the floorboards get ground down, watch her sink deeper and deeper. She was eye-level with my toes. And when I tried to talk to her, she would just rock harder.

\*

I go to the box covered in dung. I take the lid off and right in the box, where there was once a bean, is now a face. A very little face. It smiles at me.

Hello, I say.

Hello, the face says.

What do I do with you? I ask.


Bring me to her, says the face. Put me under her tongue.

I have to get on the floor and reach down. It is a difficult thing to put a little face in someone's mouth if they are rocking.

And then I hear: Hello.

\*

She keeps rocking, but she speaks too, and listens. Even when she is so far below earth that I must visit her with a rope tied to the bedpost, I can still talk to her. And she speaks back to me, and also listens.



Lisa Markowitz received an M.F.A. from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. She teaches at a small private high school in Bellingham, Washington, and her poems have appeared or are forthcoming in such journals as *Colorado Review*, *American Poetry Journal*, *Cream City Review*, and *Mad Poets Review*.

*I cannot pinpoint a specific moment or a single tale, but I know what it means. As my life becomes less and less my own, I find it easier to watch, in awe of how far away I am from that girl. She was of course afraid of the forest, the wolves and the witches. I want to rewrite it all, but I cannot go back and be her again, even having read my fairy tale, even having ripped its pages from the book. Now I look back at blurry but immovable words in many languages and versions, void of the body, the details, and I don't really know what happened. But the fairy tale keeps me. I go on in gratitude and so much wonder because of the tales and because of her.*

LISA MARKOWITZ

*Hood*

I'd like to say he entered the car  
on the way there. He entered it,  
cupped his hands over.

Mine were yellow and we drove  
where girls run on grass, white-lined  
path of Cleveland Pears.

Track of rolling green  
where the girls are.

They spoke in the most un-  
usual way. Marble mantle,

rows of pictures  
framed in milk.

Wine from a god-  
ghost, elixirs and

plum cake  
from mother  
to mother.

Metallic blouses cuffed  
and swelled. I wore  
a bright red hat

toe-tapped,  
singer of  
a Sunday-  
writhing.

I'd like to tell about the light,  
white daffodil folded through  
the cracked double door.

Wooden rafters and the wolf  
topped the wood, pressed his  
toes playfully into our heads.

His fur filed  
the backs of ours  
for food and lumber.

There were long front yards felled  
over emerald grass, what sun I had  
missed.

Chairs made of maple,  
grandmas with long hair,  
glossy-lipped. I walked

past mirrors on walls in dark-  
wood one-story houses, into  
the woman-circles.


They were  
a fire, light  
continuous quiet.

Even driveways were a secret,  
planted in neighborhoods just  
off the highway,

having hardened where  
sweet shrub kept watch  
for baskets.

Intruders crawled along  
the curb hunched, hiding  
behind blackberry bush.

Only wanting  
for a glimpse.



J. A. Tyler is the author of *Inconceivable Wilson* (Scrambler Books, 2009), *Someone, Somewhere* (Ghost Road Press, 2010), *In Love with a Ghost* (Willows Wept Press, 2010), *A Man of Glass & All the Ways We Have Failed* (Fugue State Press, 2011), and *The Zoo, A Going* (Dzanc Books, 2013). His work has appeared recently in *Diagram*, *Sleepingfish*, *Caketrain*, *Hotel St. George*, *elima*, and *Action, Yes*, among others. He is also founding editor of Mud Luscious/ml press. Visit [www.mudlusciouspress.com](http://www.mudlusciouspress.com).

*A fairy tale is a wondrous thing. It is seemingly fragile and yet so easily choked into something else—it can be stretched and broken and cored and manipulated and yet remain whole, viable, vibrant. And fairy tales too are always in us, hiding, informing us, whether we want them to or not.*

*Inconceivable Wilson*

Please forgive the way I look, it's been one-hundred-and-sixty-two-thousand, four-hundred and seventeen days since this picture was taken, and before I became so much less. It may have been yesterday too. It may be tomorrow. I have failed to keep track as I should have.

And the girl who took that photograph, this image that has seeped into existence, it is a grainy worthless depiction of me now, looking the way I do, having gone so far in.

She was a woman I endeavored to train, to love me. It did not work. It does not work, treats in hand. I wanted to be her hero, a savior, instead I went and never came back. I go. I have gone.

The inside of it is darkness, a stretch of forever night, lank. Where these people exist, where I went. Nuzzled her neck for a last and then wings to sky, going. I smell her neck on my face, the powdery smell, the scent of never returning.

And the sun here is unaware, sullen with my limbs exhausted. And perhaps the picture bores her now, no longer fits, is transparent. Her holding it in fingers, watching me fade.

Maybe she stands there, terminal in front, watching the windows, waiting. No plane will house me, no steps. I no longer walk. Maybe her waiting forever or going away. She has perhaps gone away.

And I have not looked through a window since I was looking through those same windows, the glass that looks out to the tarmac, the places I left and never returned to, the heat from the asphalt, the sun.

The sun missing, is gone.

The only uniform point is that light exists somewhere, if no longer in my hands. Me, holding nothing but my body in pieces, a piece-meal fragmentation of me, my open hands.

And I do not exist. That is the now and the however.

And I don't know where they happened upon the hammer or the axe, the adze that takes hairline layers of skin from everyone, those tools. It is irrelevant, their hands holding them nonetheless.

The appearance of pregnancy and the final confirmation of nothing, birthing air perhaps as I led myself in circles, through their circles, breaking the lines.

Bone basics and tenderizing, inside the inside circles, the culture that changes and adjusts.

It was going into a circle, when I arrived, a circumference of societies and people and I made the center, am the center, have not left the center.



White, so much white, too much white, white in terms of dark, black, light, lighter, lightened.

Planes boats and a wall of starving people saying to me about not going in, about not moving through them, to the next, onward. And I went onward because I know no restrictions, I wanted.

I want.

And it is beyond strange now to exist without existing, to persist in pieces and minor movements, me being re-tuned, returned.

She was wearing a dress and it bowed around her ankles and above the tiny strap of shoes that graced her, holding her up, a column and a tower, towering this woman over me, boarding a plane and still smelling the scent of her neck.

Inside too the inside circle there was another circle, another line, another layer, yards of men and women and children, begging me off. Wanting me to leave, to go, to be apart. I went in. I always go in. I am the center.

Inside the inside was what I was searching. A village beyond the villages, people there darker still because no sun, a canopy of night, limitless.

Her dress red and in image inside, taken by my eyes and burned out. Her maybe waiting at the terminal, seeking my steps, longing. Or perhaps gone and without doubt, leaving and nothing of her behind.

Not a shoe, a strap, the red description of her shape, a mold, figurines in windows and light.

I broke the last line of men and women and children and there was darkness, glass having become magic, my goal reached: the center. Fires bloomed solid and black and I became, watching. There was no observation, I was consumed. Why I no longer exist.

This is also the color of blood but here in darkness there is only black. Even red is black. Black is black. Emptiness and yet I was full, am full. I am a part of my parts, whole, unholy.

They praised my tired arms, the legs that did not function having breached so many lines, circles, come into center and become the focus. Their eyes said such arms, such legs, but their mouths spoke in darkness and ovals of black. I understood nothing. I understand now, having gone.

Even water here is black, rivers are plains and the mountains are only when my legs go up. When they took me up, to show me how far the darkness extended, went, when my legs were back to working, standing again no more.

Forgive these images, there is barely anything left of me. There is nothing left of me. I don't know what I am, how my mind moves on. It is not, does not.

She kissed my cheek I remember and the kiss became wind and the wind here, in the dark, is black and warm, feeling on my cheek as blackened water and red. Her dress and the maybe still waiting strapped ankles,

the windows of the terminal, the blank places I will never revisit. No existence.

Light bulbs will only work with electricity and there is no electricity here and so there is no magic. I am their magic, my white limbs. I resonate here, did, do even though I am missing.

Her kiss is liquid, sliding down my face and underneath the collar I used to wear, I no longer wear, the buttons of my shirt that sprinkle their eyes when they sleep, the four holes for thread seen as a godly division, the art of their plastic refined and without edge. These borderless people, this dark.

In darkness.

The picture she holds or did hold or was holding, lessens me and minimizes, until I am no more.

I am no more.

There may be fish in this darkness, in these rivers, but they too would be black, and I am easier to find. My red is more black, my darkness is more profound, given the white of my arms and legs, the glow of my torso without a shirt.

I huddled inside of the village, the world I came to observe, and became the village, the persistence of their consumption, the every-waning vastness that used to be me.

I truly hope she is not waiting, I am never coming back.

Jennifer Parks states: I like to think of my drawings as old photographs of a past life or lives. Photographs of a world that doesn't exist in history books, in a place that you cannot find on an atlas. I like to think of my drawings as memories of a world that once existed. Memories of people that I was once close to and still long for. Of a world that I can only painfully reach for and never grasp.

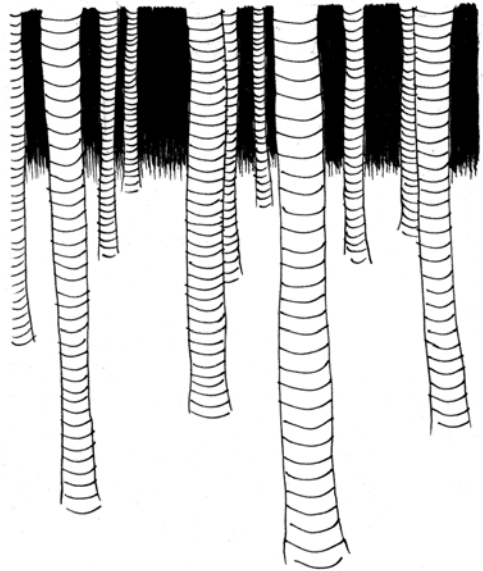
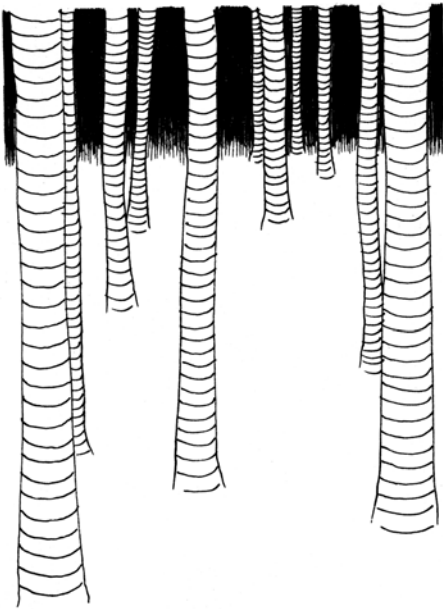
There are mainly two mediums that I work with, charcoal and pen & ink. My charcoal drawings are dark and dreamy. They represent my childhood, my nightmares, and those dark places that are scary yet familiar. These drawings are illustrative, well thought out, and more process oriented.

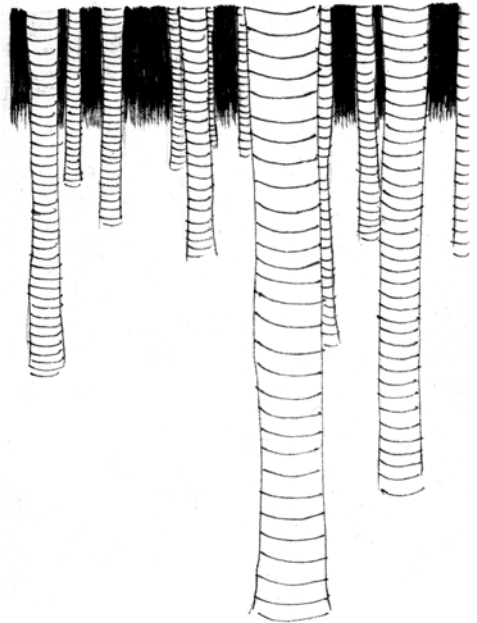
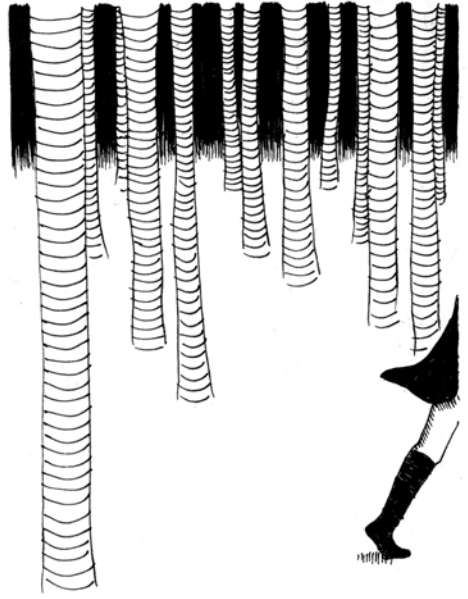
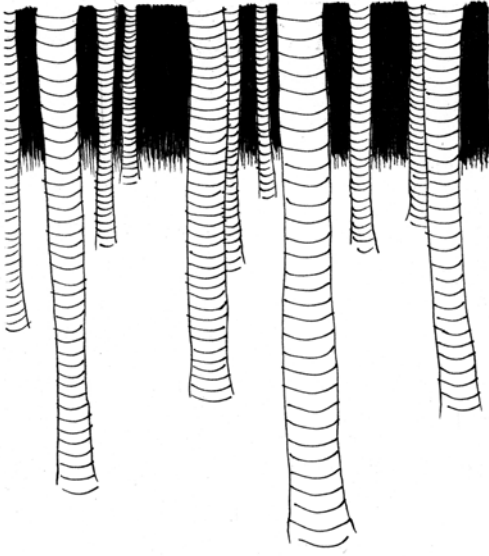
My pen and ink drawings are more of a release and form of therapy for what I think is an obsessive compulsive disorder. I don't think about what I'm drawing or what the end result will be. I just let the ink flow from my fingers, drawing line after line after line until there is a good balance of dark and light, pattern and space, and maybe a familiar face looking back at me.

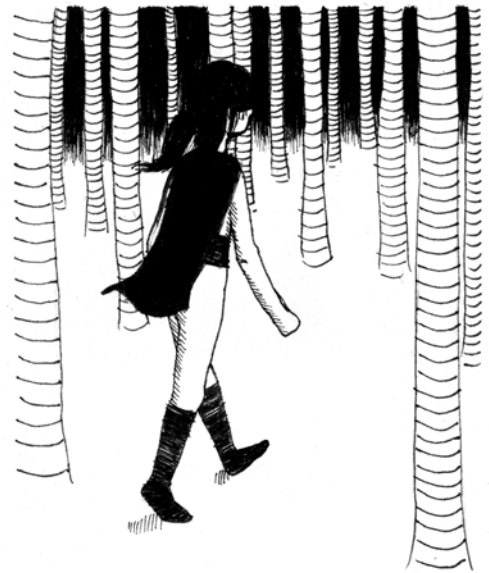
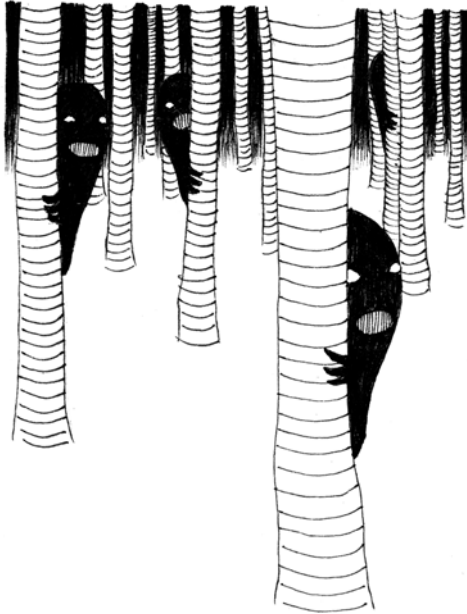
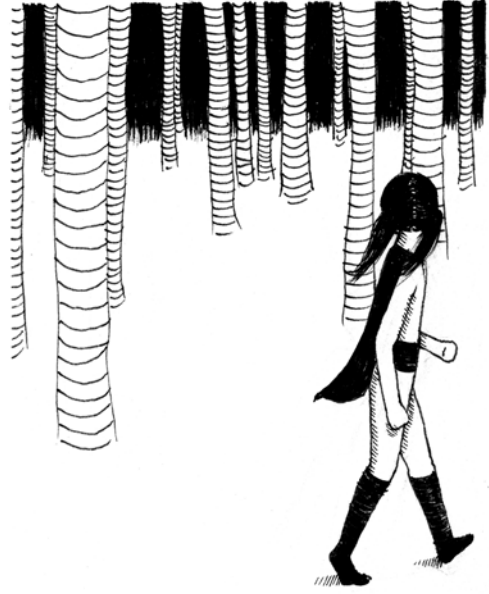
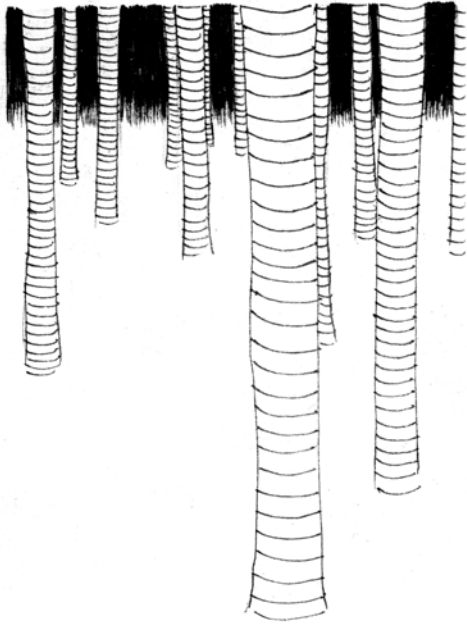
I rarely use color because I rarely dream in color. My dreams and memories are dark, and foggy. They are smudged by charcoal. I tend to think of my drawings as a representation of my dreamworld.

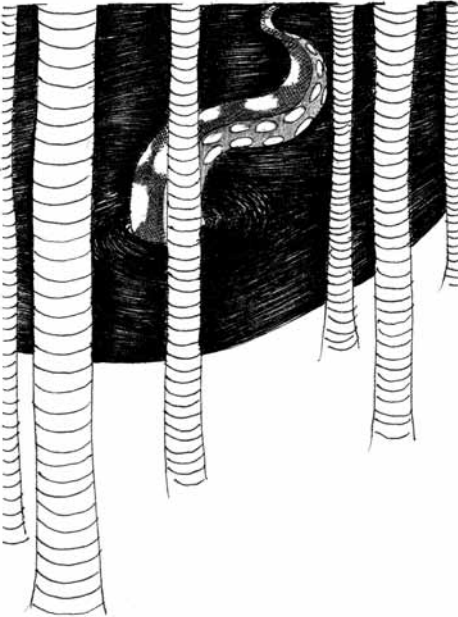
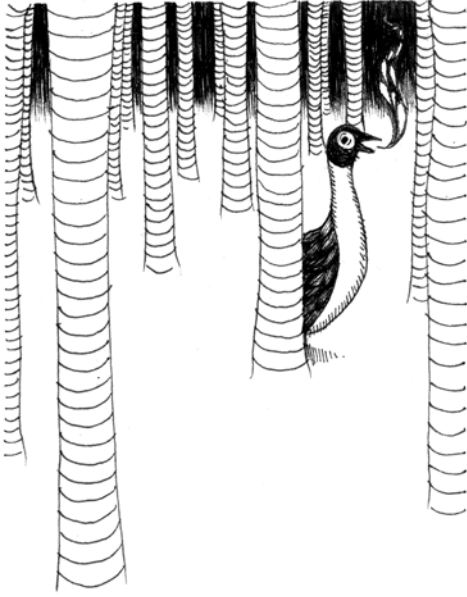
*I think fairy tales are a wonderful way to escape the mundane-ness of the world around us. Especially as children, we long for something magical and colorful, somewhere we can feel safe, and characters we can relate to. I was always immersed in some sort of fairy tale world. My two favorites were Alice in Wonderland and The Wizard of Oz. They helped me to cope with the real world, which, for whatever reasons, I longed to escape. The stories that I grew up with have helped me flourish as an artist. They influence my drawings and my comics in ways that nothing else could. Somewhere deep inside me there is a dark world of fictional characters amidst fictional landscapes where I can escape to become whoever I long to be. Be it a superhero, a fierce two-headed lion, or an army of secret underground plant creatures. Fairy tales are magic.*

*They Met  
in a  
Dream*

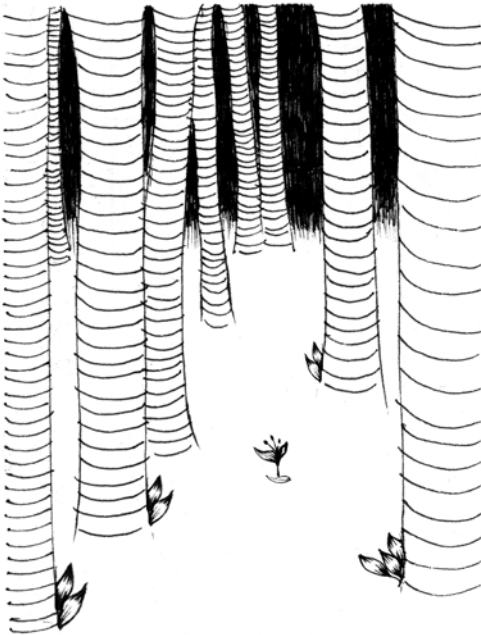
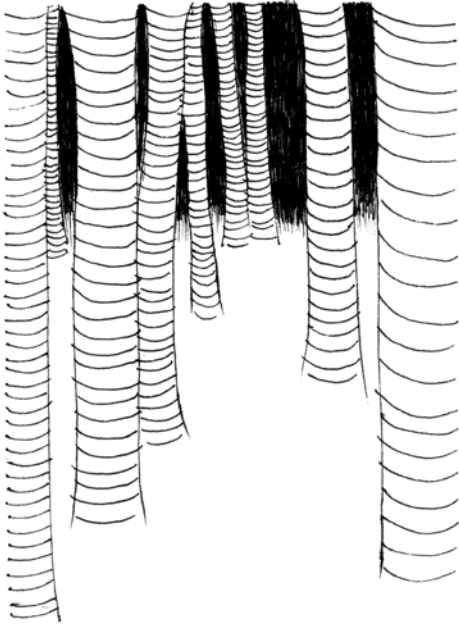


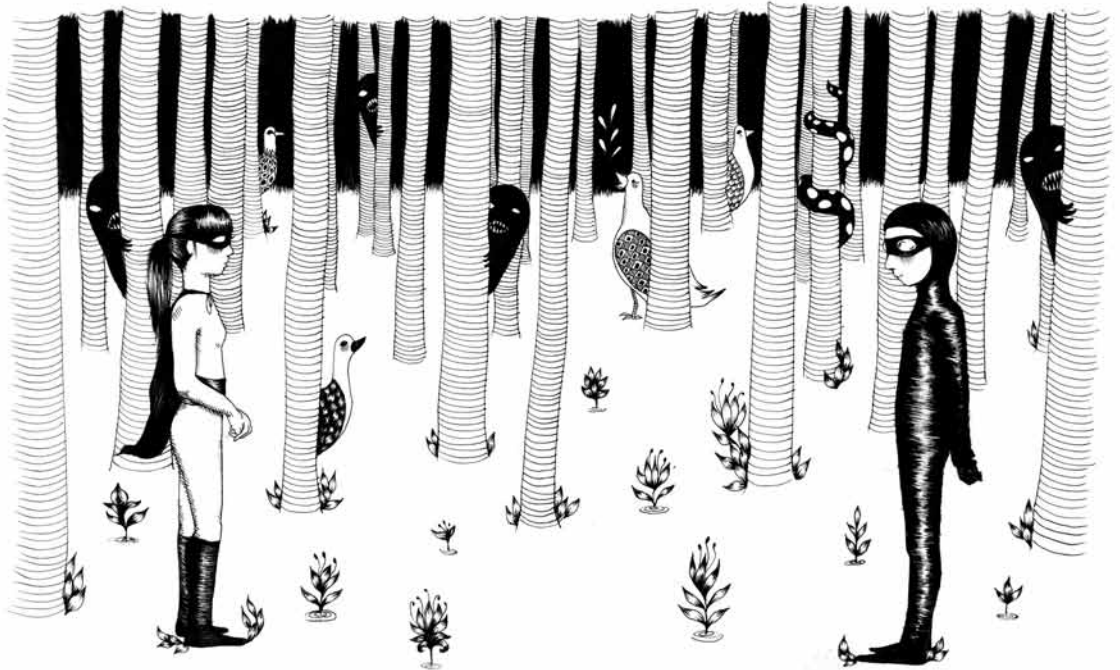




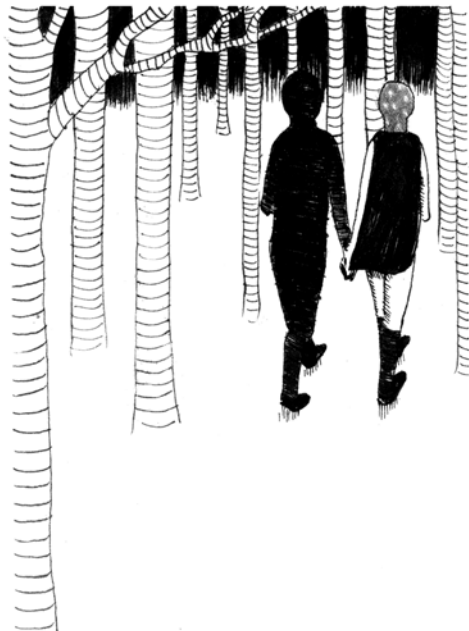


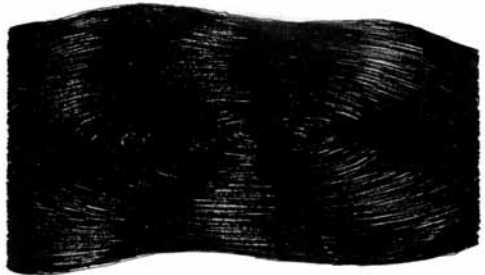
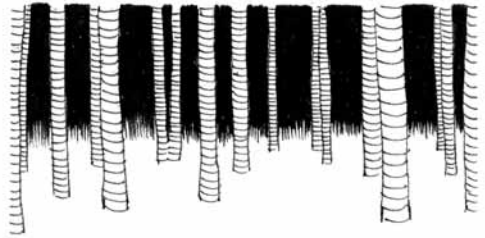
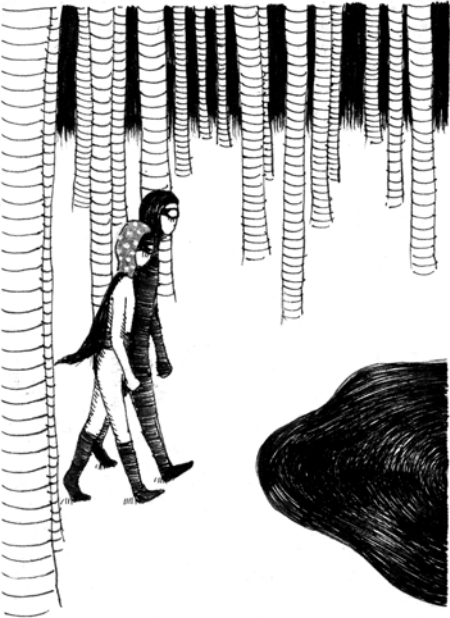
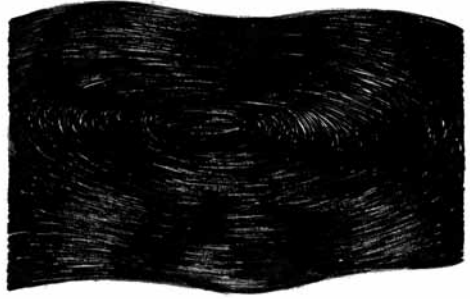
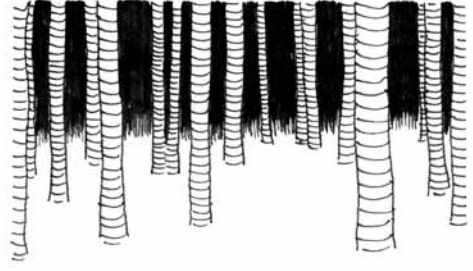
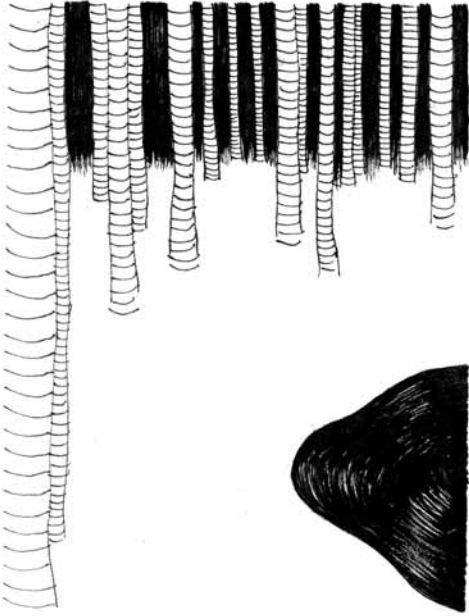


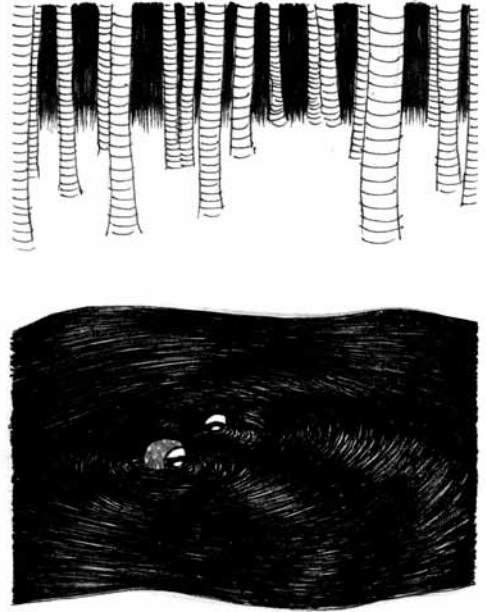
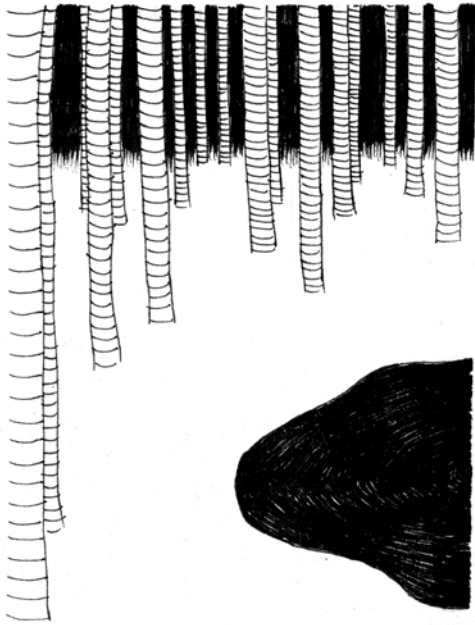
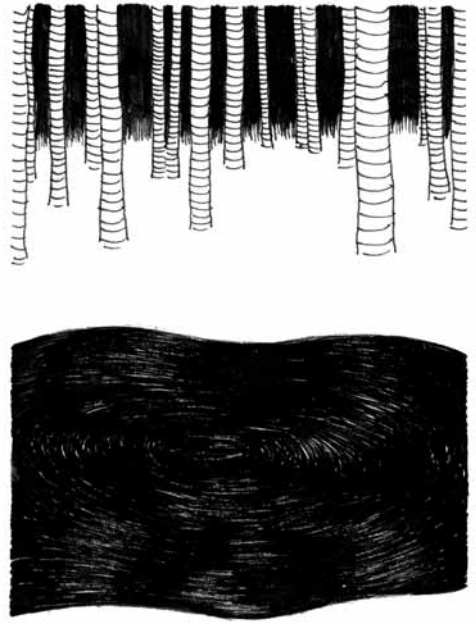
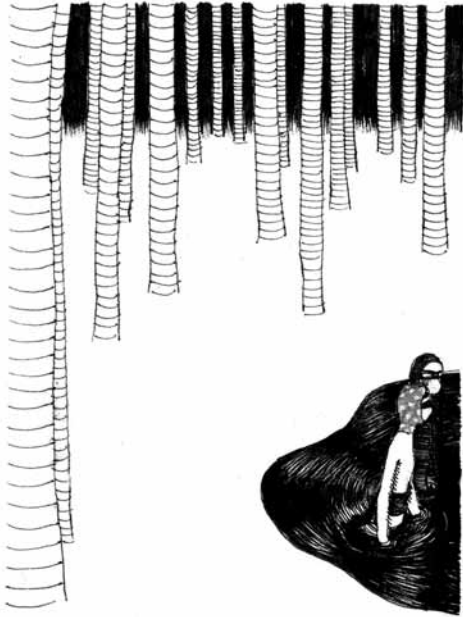


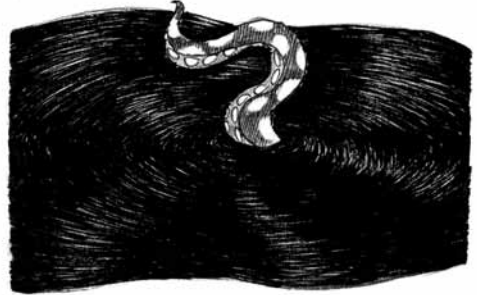
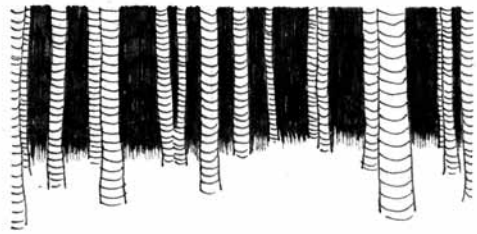
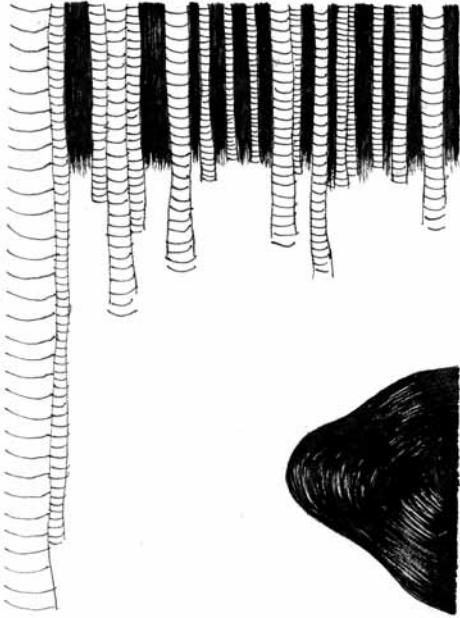
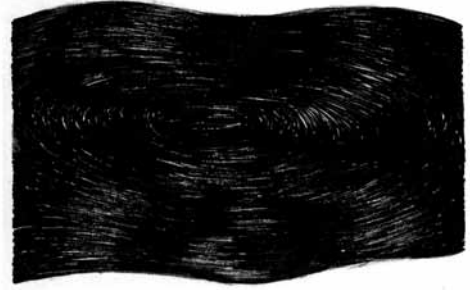
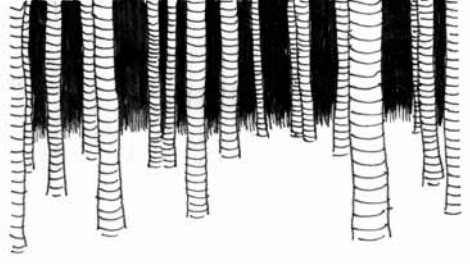
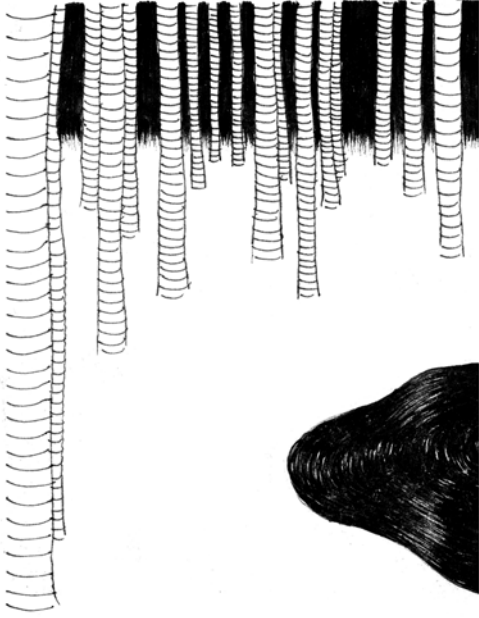




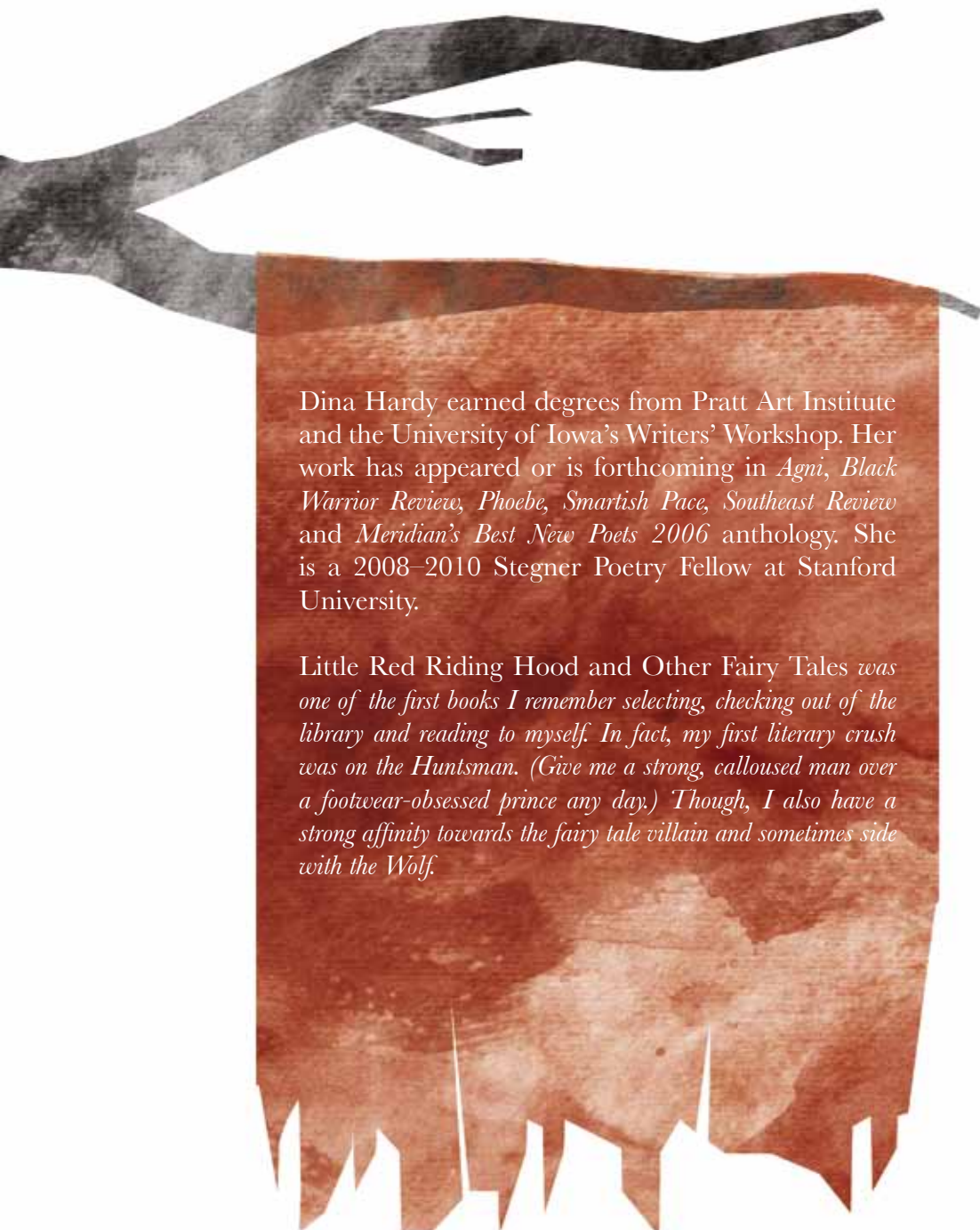












Dina Hardy earned degrees from Pratt Art Institute and the University of Iowa's Writers' Workshop. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Agni*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Phoebe*, *Smartish Pace*, *Southeast Review* and *Meridian's Best New Poets 2006* anthology. She is a 2008–2010 Stegner Poetry Fellow at Stanford University.

*Little Red Riding Hood and Other Fairy Tales was one of the first books I remember selecting, checking out of the library and reading to myself. In fact, my first literary crush was on the Huntsman. (Give me a strong, calloused man over a footwear-obsessed prince any day.) Though, I also have a strong affinity towards the fairy tale villain and sometimes side with the Wolf.*



## *The Huntsman*

Even the coyotes couldn't find enough to eat  
this winter. Bellies flat to spine, paws clean of blood.  
So you'll forgive me for taking this job  
with the Queen. A gruesome task, I'll admit,  
but the pay is good. Not that I agree with her  
*to be the fairest in the land*. Can't pay rent  
with *fair*, I say, I just need a few coins  
to keep the debts down. Keep that in mind  
when I tell you she ordered me to  
*take this child, white as snow, into the woods*  
*and stab her to death*. So deep in the woods,  
would she know if I used a gun—something quick?

Did I mention the pay was good? Sweetened  
even more when the Queen requested the child's liver  
and lungs as receipt, proof of death. Declared  
she'd cook them with salt and eat them.  
It was enough to turn my empty stomach ...  
but the thought of those gold coins, some ale, a steak.  
I signed the contract, services rendered by end of week.

Picked the child up Tuesday morning. Time to walk  
far from the castle. She was a typical teenager,  
misunderstood, mad at her step-mother, father

worked all the time. I tried not to listen, tried  
not to think of her lily skin, virgin thighs, would she  
... *ever find a boyfriend so far out in the middle  
of nowhere? Where are we going? Who are you?*  
So many questions from those glistening lips.

I couldn't decide between the gun or the knife—  
brought both. Unsheathed the knife and began  
carving the likeness of a small person  
out of a branch that had fallen to the ground.  
I was passing minutes that seemed like the end  
of sand. Etched a small hat on the dwarf's head.  
She was amused, asked if she could keep it,  
I was so *talented*. I looked at her throat, wrists;  
hands quicker than the eye, I grabbed her hair,  
lunged. Didn't know a girl could scream so ...

Birds flew in flocks from trees  
small eardrums ruptured. Then,  
the tears, the pleading for her life,  
curses I'd only heard in taverns.  
So much anger in such a little thing.  
So beautiful, but I pity any man  
who ends up with her. She was so lost,  
wild animals would devour her  
and my hands could stay clean.  
I released, yelled, *Run!*

Like a prayer answered, a young boar  
trotted by and I struck. Such a feast!

I saved the lungs and liver, exchanged them  
for riches it took me months to spend.

It's spring now and I'm perusing  
a wolf this time. Hired by a farmer  
who wants to protect what's left  
of his sheep. Deep in the woods,  
deeper into the woods, I behold  
her red cape, smell her cakes,  
ripe wine, ask *What else  
are you carrying under your apron?*

Distracted by flowers, she satisfied  
my desires. I promised to lead her  
to the right path, but our diversions  
led to death, you know the story:  
*Grandma, what big ...  
The better to ...  
she was eaten by the beast.*

As I was passing the cottage, I heard  
a familiar scream. Face to snout, I couldn't  
complete this job either—not with her inside.  
Forced my knife down the throat of the wolf.  
It wasn't too late, she knew what she had to do.  
I watched as she cut from the inside out  
and set herself free of me.

Margo Berdeshevsky's book, *Beautiful Soon Enough*, received Fiction Collective Two's American Book Review/ Ronald Sukenick Innovative Fiction Award and was published by University of Alabama Press in 2009. She is the author of a poetry collection, *But a Passage in Wilderness* (Sheep Meadow Press, 2007) and a forthcoming novel, *Vagrant* (Red Hen Press).

*I particularly love a line written by Jean Cocteau that says: "The poet is a liar who always speaks the truth." For me—fairy tale is that place where the poetic and the lie/truth/lie/truth . . . meet. A poetic, often metaphoric telling—which leads me through the maze like a golden thread to my own truths, while I/we accept it as mere story. How could it be nearly true? And then we know that it is. This continues to fascinate me. While fairy tale is that place where fiction lets in the poetic, to invoke the more ecstatic or non-linear realities.*

MARGO BERDESHEVSKY

## *Old Wives' Tale*

*or whatever became of red riding or the rest ...*

The petals of the white ones draped like whispers, layer over layer, gauze-thin. Skins, veils, sculpted birds, but not birds. White irises. Witches.

*Are the black irises the most rare?*

*Yes, that's right, the rarest. Lovely as wolves, eh?*

Petronella was the old man's gardener. Muscled, freckled. Frizzed in all directions, morning sun bleeding right through it, her tawny hair haloed a large head. *And have you seen this one? She's the good witch, that's what I call her.* Petronella's Yorkshire accent boomed in the otherwise still garden, earthy as her thick bare legs; her small scythe was working at the weeds, careful of every single petal.

I neared the blossom she pointed to, a double black with a second flower of golden tattoos, an elegant erection in the center of it. I *ahhhhed*. Lowered, to breathe the most delicate perfume, I had thought it might be heavier, dark as the colors. But it was all light, levitated into scent.

To have tasted a little love in your life, but not enough. To have dreamt of a good wolf. But not the bad one. To have buried the grandmother, and the damaged past.

But I'd been feeling that revenant chill, all morning. Covered it with deep breaths of country air. *Ah*, I repeated, already turned away. No time for bad memories. I was there with my notebook, to gather the names of the roses in the old man's garden, that was my project this morning. Though presences of some darker memoir neared, I turned my back on my own mood. Not now, I hoped. Not now.

They say Churchill raised roses to soften his “black dog days,” days when he was doing badly, days when the destroyer deep in him was raging or morose; well so did the old man. He could rage, glower, and then raise roses. Could hire women to help him. Smile. Bare his teeth. At them. Or at me.

I covered my own dark days with crisp linen sheets. Voile curtains. Extra cookies. Parisian wine. Parisian tears. Trips to the old man’s garden.

Here, every rose had its name and a tiny silver foil tag he’d engraved for it, and I’d always wanted a list of them, names like an orchestral tuning. Music, I thought, when you ran them all together. Let’s have music. Let the buried psyche find some peace.

I’d visited each day that week, coming in behind the small, planked garden door, like an old familiar. But I was afraid I couldn’t remember all the names; iron latch on a sky pale door, and inside, his collected Circes. The landscape had no pigs. It did have lambs, soon to be slaughtered and not knowing it. Bleating.

I’m a country girl at heart. Basket of goodies. Gatherer of flowers. Gatherer of details, by intellect. A player, by taste. Not exactly Red Riding Hood any longer, by innocence. I twitched my bare feet in the grass. Glad that the old man’s Petronella hadn’t run a mower this week of my expensive and well-worth-it visit, during his trip-to-the-city absence. The old man was greedy. He charged me. But coming south was a birthday present to my middle age. A woman of sixty deserves gifts in the sun. And bettered memories.

I’d climbed the incline from his ancient stone steps and wooden house, feeling old and determined as the landscape myself. Left my shoes behind and walked to the blue garden door, ready to mull his twenty-seven varieties of roses and write down their names, this time. I felt lured as a sailor. Circe, I remembered. Hecate’s daughter with the

Sun, lured sailors to her island where she had them, and turned them into pigs. I returned my attention to his roses.

There was his gardener, Petronella, weeding silently in the sun. I liked her immediately. *Thanks for not running the mower this week, I love the silence. And I love your garden, well, his garden, but you do the work, right?* She preened like a mother pigeon, I noticed. I like to make people feel proud of themselves. The flowers she tended were watching us. I began scribbling their names, loved the sound the names made in my mouth as I whispered them all together. Empereur de Maroc. Bishop Darling. Souvenir de Malmaison. Bon Silene. Compte de Chambord, Le Baron de Gobbard. La Reine Victoria. Madame Laroche Lambert. Mary Manners, Saint Cecilia et Souvenir de Saint Annes, Madame Gregoire de Saint Aechelin, Madame Hardy, Charles de Mills. I said them aloud and Petronella laughed. *Quite the party, eh?* I looked squarely at her; was she a girl who could play with magic?

*Let's invite them then. How about that?*

She looked at me, animal to another animal. Her big head cocked to one side, frizzed mane drinking the heating sunshine, now.

*How about just the men? I'll share, my dear. We can share!* We shared an initial low-register women's laugh. She was a country girl and so was I.

*He won't be back until Sunday,* I stated a fact we both knew. Then, *Do you happen to know how to summon spirits?* Again we laughed, a purred music from our bellies. As naturally as flowers opening in flagrante. I raised my left thumb and let it bend all the way backwards, a double-jointed twist, just as my grandmother used to show me hers. Grandmother, I mused for a quick second: *ah, Grandma, what did you do with all the wolves?*

I touched my own breasts, just lightly, through my sweater, then I undid the buttons. Silence descended like a wide swathe, a black and pearled cloud. Distant bleats of the spring lambs muted. Improvisations between crows and finches lowered their volumes until we didn't notice.

The crickets that come at nightfall came now, their droning lullaby that could quiet any other sounds. Petronella pulled off her work smock and let it drop in the grass. Her two dogs wandered off into the shade; heads down on their paws, they slid into dreams. The gardener put her scythe away, opened her shorts, I put my notebook down, neither following nor leading we began to circle the garden, heel-toe, heel-toe—reached out our hands as we passed, as though to caress opened flowers, an index finger grazing pink-tongued buds. Especially the roses. The irises observed us, attendant; they were now skins and curling veils, sculpted birds, but not birds... *We want just the men*, I whispered. Petronella nodded. A soft growl was what she uttered as Bishop Darling turned into apparition and then flesh, and the sun again bleached through the cloud cover. We both knew that's who he was. Bishop. He watched us both, ghost to ghost, animal to animal. L'Empereur du Maroc appeared, flesh as well, now—standing like a pond, clearing to show its largest red fish. This might have been enough, we were only two—but Compte de Chambord, Bon Silene, then all of them, and the two of us. We inspected like jewelers, horse traders. *What big eyes you have*. One murmured, *All the better to see you with, my dear*. We nodded knowingly, continued to inspect. Nails. Hair. Teeth. Shoes. Beards. Thumbs.

*I always check the thumbs*, I said softly. She looked at me, ready for any crone's secret. *Indicates size*, I taught her. Happy, giddy, silly, we picked. And then?

Our guests were experienced, we deemed. Le Baron de Gobbard plucked the black iris with a bow, and he brought it to me, humming. A tryst, I climbed him like the nearest oak, barely heard the girl say *Dear, dear Bishop Darling*, while her dogs snored.

It was time to let the dark dog of dark moods—rest.



To take off one's clothes, there—petal by petal in spring sun, and naked, to say, *Is a blackened purple iris with golden tatouage the most rare witch of morning in a secret garden behind its latched planks? Or the wild white?*

I left the garden latch open. And walked out naked, this year.

I'm a collector of details, but I told the old man none of these. He's content to have a rose garden. Let him. Content with his Yorkshire gardener, and a friend from Paris who says she's working on a collection of Circe stories; he knows my love of tales. He sleeps all afternoon; and then again at sunset; dry pink skin flakes around his temples, into his eyes, peels across his swelling hands; he's becoming fat; and deaf; he's tired of being a laureate; he's had all the successes he needs; maybe he'll raise goldfish; or cruel black dogs; time for a new world he's said often. He means new ancestors. Kinder memories. Altered fairy tales. His age.

When he closes his swelling lids, in his old stone house in the valley of lambs and fogbanks—it's a simple past; the ones who whisper don't speak of me, I was just a visitor. He was my—and then he became—and

He used to be my husband.





THE  
END





