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FEATURING STORIES BY:
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WE BURIED THE DOG

by Lindsey Turner



We buried the dog the day after Christmas, in the maple grove.

The next day he showed up at the back door.

I figured there had been a misunderstanding. I let him in, even though he was covered in dirt. When Paul and I retired for the evening, I patted the duvet so the dog would join us as usual. He sat across the room and watched us. He was in that same spot when we woke up.

At breakfast, Paul was quiet. He stood at the kitchen window, watching the dog eat sticks in the back yard.

"Why's he doing that?" Paul said.

I sipped my coffee. "He didn't eat dinner last night. He's hungry."

"For sticks?"

"He's a dog."

"Is he?"

Such a Paul thing to say. Obviously the dog is a dog. What else would he be?

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Kris and Sam brought champagne and fireworks over for New Year's Eve. Sam sat on the sidewalk and swirled two sparklers in the air while Kris handed Paul and me paper cups of bubbly. The dog watched from the porch.

"I thought you were going to have to put your dog down over Christmas," Sam said.

"We thought so too," I said.

"We did put him down," Paul said.

Kris and Sam looked at each other.

"It was a misunderstanding," I said. I felt Kris's hand on my shoulder.

"That's a nice way of putting it," Paul said.

Kris moved her hand to her pocket, eyed the ground, and sipped her wine. Sam lit another sparkler and held it out. The dog leapt off the steps and, before Sam could flinch, took the sparkler's spitting end in his mouth, yanking it out of Sam's hand.

"What's he doing?" Sam asked, scrambling to his feet. The dog worked the sparkler against the concrete, bending it, shoving it further into his mouth, smoke curling out of his nostrils.

"He eats sticks," I said, smiling. "He's a dog."



I was on the roof taking down the Christmas lights when I looked over and saw the dog sitting near the chimney.

"Paul!" I called. "Did you let the dog up here?"

I heard the screen door slam. "What?" Paul looked up from beside the porch, his hand cupped around his eyes. "What did you say?"

I leaned my head over the gutter. "The dog! Did you let him up here?"

"Are you joking?"

"Of course I'm not joking. He could get hurt. Did you let him up here?" I held out a bundle of lights to Paul. He didn't move. I looked back at the dog. He was standing on his hind legs, front paws leaned against the chimney, nicking embers out of the air with his mouth.

"No, honey, I did not let the dog on the roof." I could practically hear Paul's eyes rolling.

"Well, he's on the roof. How do we get him down? He'll get hurt if we don't."

Paul put his hands on his hips and sighed loudly. That is such a Paul reaction, to be so put out by someone in need, even a dog. Our dog.

"Just take these lights and I'll get him myself." I tossed the bundle toward Paul and heard him curse as it hit the ground.

The dog was licking his lips, savoring another ember, when he noticed me creeping toward him. He growled.

"It's okay, buddy, I just want to get you down so you don't fall." I reached out.

He growled again and backed away, hackles up. His whiskers were singed.

That night we heard him walking around on the roof until we fell asleep.

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We didn't see the dog for a couple of days. We heard him on the roof sometimes, little skitters and thumps.

I went outside and called for him. The pile of sticks I'd placed in a bowl on the porch sat untouched.

"Why don't we just go up there and get him?" Paul asked.

"He'll come down when he's ready."

"What makes you think he's even still up there?" Paul said, his eyes narrowing. We hadn't heard the dog in half a day. "What if something happened to him?"

Paul took a garbage bag from under the sink and climbed onto the roof. I stood at the foot of the ladder, waiting to hear the bad news. Paul's head peeked over the gutter.

"He's not up here," he said.

"What do you mean he's not up there?" I started up the ladder.

"You don't have to come up here. I looked everywhere. He's not up here."

I climbed the ladder anyway. Paul was right. The dog wasn't there.

"You didn't have to come up here and check behind me," Paul said. "You don't think I can find a dog on a roof by myself?"

"I just wanted to be sure."

"You think I would have done something to him and left him."

"Well. You haven't been very nice to him lately, have you?"

"Are you out of your mind?"

Here it was. Finally. "What?"

He stared at me, mouth open. "Do you actually think I would ... I swear to God, Ruby." Classic Paul. To come up to the brink of an argument and then try to avoid it by just spitting my name.

I looked at the chimney. It was covered in sooty pawprints, from the base to the cap. The cap!

"Let's go back inside," I said.

"Listen, we have to talk about this," Paul said as I lowered myself down the ladder.

"I'm not having a roof argument with you about our dog, Paul!"

"Not the dog — *this!*" Paul waved his hand at me as if doing a magic trick. "Ruby!"

I ran inside to the fireplace, scooped handfuls of ash and threw them on the flames.

"What are you doing?" Paul called from the doorway.

"Help me put this out!" I yelled. As if it wasn't obvious.

Paul, frowning, brought a cup of water and poured it on the shrinking flames.

"I need a flashlight!"

Paul pulled his phone out of his back pocket, turned on the flashlight, and handed it to me.

I waved the smoke away and pointed the light into the shaft. Two shimmering yellow orbs reflected back at me, halfway up.

"Honey, I'm going to call Dr. Vega," Paul said. "She told us to call if you — if we — had any issues while you were recovering."

"No, wait — he's here! He's in the fireplace! Help me get him out!"

"How are we going to get a dog out of the *fireplace?*" Paul said, like he was scolding a child.

I remembered the pack of sparklers Sam had left on the table, and rose to get them.

“Give me a light!” I told Paul.

“I gave you the only light I had,” he said, his hands up.

“Give me the lighter in your front left pocket,” I said, holding out my hand. “The one you hide from me because you think I don’t know you smoke.”

Paul’s lips pursed. He fished the lighter out of his trousers, flicked it, and presented the flame to me. “I’m quitting. I’m trying to quit.”

That’s Paul — always trying to quit things he never should have started.

I lit the sparkler and held it to the mouth of the fireplace. Paul backed away.

The chimney shook. Air rushed from the shaft and kicked up clouds of ash into the den. Paul covered his face with his arm. My hand shook as I held the sparkler higher. I heard sniffing before I saw the snout and felt a sharp wetness on my hand.

I shrieked and brought my fingers to my mouth.

“Oh for Christ’s sake,” Paul said. He grabbed the poker and charged the fireplace.

“What are you doing?”

“That fucking thing bit you!”

I grabbed Paul’s arm and tugged. “Leave him alone! He wasn’t trying to hurt me!”

The dog lay on the hearth, chewing on the sparkler. It had gone out.

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“I think this might be my fault,” Paul said as we lay in bed looking at our tablets.

The dog sat in the corner, watching us. He was black with soot.

"What's your fault?" I placed my tablet on my chest and reached over to pat Paul's hand. It was clammy.

"The dog. I think the dog is my fault."

"How could the dog be your fault? Every single thing that happens doesn't have something to do with you." I regretted it as soon as I said it. Dr. Vega is always encouraging me to stop the verbal notching — making those quick little cuts that, over time, result in a lot of blood loss.

"I slept with a witch."

Paul looked straight ahead, his neck and face blooming pink. That explained why his hand was so cold; all the blood was rushing to his skull.

"I'm so sorry, Ruby. I'm a fucking idiot. I can't even believe it myself. After all the work we've done. After everything we've—you've—been through." He pulled his hand out of mine and sat up, turning his back to me. "I don't expect you to forgive me or even talk to me right now." He put his forehead in his hands.

I stared at his bald spot. "What do you mean 'witch'? Like ... a goth?"

"No, like a witch, with a cauldron and shit!" Paul said. "It's just ... you and I ... the fight at Thanksgiving. I didn't know you were in the hospital or what you had done to yourself. I thought you had gone to stay with your sister, that you'd finally left me. And this witch was at the bar and she was just, you know, witchy and sexy, sort of. I mean, not really, but she was there. I think she put a spell on me, I really do—"

"Oh, for God's sake!" I said before I could stop myself. "I didn't make you fuck a witch. That *witch* didn't make you fuck a witch. *You* fucked a witch. Just like you fucked your intern. And your internist. And God knows who else. *You* did that. Take some responsibility, Paul."

"No, you're right! Goddamn it, Ruby, you're right," Paul said, shaking his head. "I'm so sorry. I'm pathetic. I know you can't forgive me. Not this time. I can't even believe it myself. I swore it wouldn't happen again. To you, to Dr. Vega. I should have been there for you but I was just out there—I'm an asshole, Ruby. A fucking asshole."

"What did she say?"

“Who, Dr. Vega? I haven’t told her ye—”

“Jesus, Paul! The witch! What did the witch say to you?”

Paul wiped his face on the sheets and looked at me over his shoulder. “She said— ah, fuck. Ruby. Fuck. I can’t even believe I’m saying this. She said she’d fuck me once but I’d lose something important to me. She said she’d fuck me twice and I could keep it forever. I thought she was— ah, fuck.” He was sobbing then, face in the sheets, his voice breaking up like a bad radio signal.

The dog lay down and sneezed a black streak of soot onto the rug.

“Christ, Ruby, I thought she was talking about you!” Paul blew his nose into the sheets.

I handed him a tissue from my nightstand. Typical Paul, to come to a confession unprepared. To make a mess he had no intention of cleaning up.

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The dog brings me things now. Sticks, mostly. After holidays, he’ll dredge up burnt husks of fireworks and the odd spent sparkler from the neighbors’ yards and place them at my feet.

He keeps to himself most of the time, and watches me from across whatever room we’re in. He hasn’t been back up on the roof, which I’m glad about. I keep a fire burning in the living room. He nips at the flames and gnaws on the black, crumbling logs.

Sometimes the dog brings me bones. Long ones, with strings of flesh still stuck to them. Curved ones, pocked with his teeth marks. Small ones that seem at first more like rocks than bones.

Today, he has brought me a skull.

“You have to leave him alone,” I say to the dog, shaking the skull to make sure he makes the connection between my displeasure and the stinking, yellowed object in my hand. “We will never have any peace if you don’t leave him be.”

I tuck the skull into my sweater and grab the shovel from the porch. The dog trots behind me through the back yard, past the shriveled chrysanthemums and the wood pile, to the maple grove. The weather has turned cold again and leaves crunch under our feet. We reach the grove and look at one another.

The dog's eyes are so black sometimes I feel short of breath.

He watches as I drive the shovel into the dirt. We haven't had a freeze yet so the soil is still soft and easy to turn. I toss the skull into the hole with the rest of Paul's bones and shovel dirt back on top.

The dog whines. He always protests this part.

I think it's because he remembers being in this same hole. How the dirt must have felt as it fell, heavier and heavier, on his body. How our voices must have grown more distant as we returned him to the earth.

I put my hand out to comfort him.

As usual, he growls.

Lindsey Turner is a writer, graphic designer, and photographer who lives in Nashville with her husband, son, and dog in a perpetual state of disarray. She likes to make things and tell stories. Her writing has been published in *Ghost City Review*, *Coffin Bell Journal*, *The Great and Secret Thing*, and *The Commercial Appeal*. She writes about her life sometimes at theogeo.com, and wastes more time than is wise on Twitter (@tindseylurner) and Instagram (@lindseyallisonturner).

RED WIDOW

by L.W. Nicholson



My new neighbor, there, along the fence row of our adjoining properties, turns her neck toward me like a rusty cog. Barefoot and dirty with a small dog at her heels, she measures me from head to toe as if she is fitting me for something.

I say I must head off, that my husband will be back soon, that the oven is on. Each of my excuses drops like snow at my feet, never reaching her. She looks both in me and past me, smoothing my forehead with her gaze.

"You have children," she says, not a question.

"I do," I say, and it feels like an admission of guilt.

"You better come on," she says.

Sometimes I bury my husband's things in the yard. Sometimes I make extra mounds so he won't know which one has the keys or the wallet or the paper receipt or my long strand of hair.

In the distance, I hear a loud call like a fire engine, a clew-bird, a heron, a bird of grace and nightmares.

She tells me her mother was so afraid of overcooking eggs she barely cooked them at all.

She says she grew up in Barren Holler, sometimes called Poverty Point, and at night the sky became a black shroud, holy funeral for the sun. They kept a five-gallon bucket next to the fireplace for spitting.

We carefully bend back branches and avoid sticker bushes. Every few feet, cobwebs tickle and stick to my face. Her name is Agnes. Her dog's name is Loaf. The mayapples shroud the forest floor, and Agnes shows me how to spot bloodroot. Now I see it everywhere, its leaves like little hands holding white flowers in their palms. Agnes moves like the trees, waxing and waning through the brush. My motions are awkward next to hers, too careful, too rigid. I had never met the woods before.

She says you have to greet it. She says it has to give you permission. She says it has to love you.

My children say I am too old for loving.

She points to a tiny spider with what looks like a hard-backed shell. The spider boasts a spiny abdomen of black and white. It considers us, there in an aisle of prayer along its bicycle wheel, sewn and solemn.

"Look at that," Agnes says, pointing to the arachnid. "People want to talk about aliens out there in space. Green googly eyes and all that. But they're already here. They're us."

"I really should be walking home," I tell her. "My husband will be worried. He doesn't like to worry."

Agnes says she never saw an alien, but she saw a ghost once.

She says she worked in a facility for a while, wiping butts, where she met plenty of haunted people.

She says church can't offer her anything that the woods haven't already.

Sometimes I pray, and sometimes I don't. Either way it sounds like a blank sheet of paper.

I follow her into an old trailer balanced precariously on cinder blocks. Loaf leaps past us and curls up on a blanket by the wood stove. The house smells like mice and sage and old cups of coffee. Agnes grabs my hand and pulls me into a small room with a single yellow chair and walls of shelves lined with books about medicinal herbs and animal identification. She pulls down a guide about spiders and shows me the illustrations.

"It was a spined micrathena, a spiny orb weaver," she says, pointing to the drawing. "They're one of the kindest spiders. They bite their prey before wrapping it. Merciful carnivores.

"People think black widow females eat the males after they mate," she goes on, "but that only happens sometimes. Red widows, though, are a little different. They look like small china cups. They don't have much interest in eating the males, but the males are insistent. He will force feed himself to the red widow female by placing his body inside her mandibles over and over until she finally submits to eating him."

"Why does he do it?"

"He's finished what he came here to do."

I want to ask her what that means, how a thing can know a purpose, how a purpose can be fulfilled. I want to tell her that there is mouse shit on her chair. I want to look like a small china cup.

Desert spiders, she tells me, eat their own mothers. Somehow I think I know this already. I feel it in my ankles and wrists, a part of ancient script written on my bones.

"Children can do that," I say.

"Yes, they can," she nods.

She brings me two brown envelopes filled with seeds marked "dill" and "lavender." She says they are easy to start, that I only need to throw them on the ground somewhere.

As I back toward the door, I see a picture in a frame: this woman, younger, her hair combed and shining. Two small children cling to her arms, their faces like river stones, and a man stands behind her, grim and gray.

I turn back and regard her, both consumed and consuming. She has been eaten, and she has been filled, both aggressor and victim.

"Kill your own snakes." She gestures to the picture.

"I'm sorry. I should be going."

Sometimes I clip my husband's shoelaces so they are too short to tie.

I leave her there, in the dark of her doorway, her long arms clutching the frame, apron and arms stained red from bloodroot, her lips dry and parted.

L.W. Nicholson is a teacher and homesteader in Southeast Missouri. She grows tomatoes and pets dogs.

WHAT PEOPLE SET INTO MOTION, THE SPIRITS CANNOT REVERSE

by Beth Alvarado



La guerra, Angie, when I knocked at her door, she was surprised to see me. After all, it's not every day that Juana of God shows up on your doorstep. But I wanted to check in on her and her sister Glenda and the girl who does not speak (although she could if she wanted or so the spirits tell me), and we'd been at the hospital, Nardo and Junie and me, and we needed a place to rest before making the trek back to Magdalena. *La Angie*, she seemed happier now that her house was full of people and now that her *novio* was home. And that is what the nuns always taught me: if you have only a crust of bread, better to share than to keep it all to yourself. What you give, it will come back.

But this *novio*, this Bobby, he was not well. Even Nardo could see it. Even little Junie. We had come for my yearly torture with the cardiologist and, again, *el doctor* had filled my veins with poison and taped his wires to my chest and made me run on a treadmill, faster and faster. *¿Juanita, can't you go any faster?* And he looked at his computer to see inside me, *mi corazón*, pumping and pumping on his screen, about to explode if you asked me but, of course, he never asks me. *¡Juanita, he told me, faster!*

He knows nothing of Juana of God, and that is just as well, but no one has called me Juanita since I was a *niña* at the orphanage in the hills of Magdalena and so it made me feel as if I would get a swat on my knuckles and so *siempre* I try to do as he says.

"Tell me," I said to this Bobby, who is *muy guapo*, I must say, *la guera*, she has good taste in men. "Tell me about this surgery."

We were sitting at the dining room table, Nardo and Bobby and Angie and me, drinking coffee, and Marisol brought out some almond scones with dried cherries and white chocolate and I was thinking about what *el doctor* would say about that when Junie started growling and, for a Chihuahua, I have to say, he has quite a deep voice. Even though he and Marisol are ancient enemies, you would think they could have come to some sort of agreement by now, but No.

"Watch it," she told him, "or you'll be an hors d'oeuvre."

And did he stop? No, he nipped at her ankles, he wouldn't back down, and so I had to pick him up and, still, safe in my lap, he growled.

"He's been falling over a lot," Nardo told Marisol as if that would soften her heart. "It's like he has a seizure or something. Clunk, over he goes, and then he gets up a few minutes later as if nothing happened."

Marisol just shrugged and put a bowl of *crema* on the table. "Maybe it's the spirits in him," she said. "*Están cansados*."

Espíritu santo, I was thinking. Even God must get tired these days.

Bobby was saying that there was a growth on his liver and they biopsied it with a long needle. Malignant. Then they went in and took it out and it was much bigger than they expected. And it had spread. Like wildfire. More tumors.

"They stuck a needle in it?" Nardo asked.

"They woke it up," I said.

"That's what I thought," Bobby said. "They pissed it off."

"*Es la verdad*," I said, "those procedures, *como se dice*, invasive, I don't believe in them."

Marisol rolled her eyes. "This from *la mujer* who scrapes the eyeballs *de los enfermos* with a kitchen knife."

Angie shook her head at Bobby. "And who plunged her hand into my gut and pulled out seven stones. Without anesthesia. No stitches needed."

"If I did that," I said, "it escapes me."

I felt a little woozy just imagining it.

"It was the spirits," Nardo said, patting my hand. "She doesn't even like the sight of blood."

"Or the thought of pain," I said.

"I didn't feel a thing," Angie shrugged.

"This cancer you have," I asked Bobby, "it is from the poison they poured into the ground? No? The Air Force, I think."

"For years," he said. "Since 1952."

"I've seen so many people sick from that, so many. They come down to *la casa* to be healed. *Pero a veces* the cancer is *muy fuerte*. *No hay nada que hacer*."

"That's what every doctor tells me: *I have done everything I can*."

"My *prima*, Marta," Marisol broke in, "she died from it. It was the lymphoma, it went straight to her brain. One day she was *loca*, two months later, dead. Only forty years old and with three kids. If she'd stayed in Cananea, she'd still be alive."

I waved my hand in the air and the rings and the bracelets made a music to gather everyone's attention. "*Los pobres*," I said. "They may as well be *los desaparecidos*. No one sees them. So what does it matter which side they live on, north or south? No one has a voice. *Nadie*."

And then Bobby, he's a smart one, he went on about how the poison sinks to the bottom of the wells, to water that is millions of years old, maybe, and they would have to pump it all out and filter it somehow, *tu sabes*, which is *muy muy caro*, and so they shut down the wells. "But do you think it stays put? It's liquid! *¡Que pendejos!*"

I put Junie down on the floor and he whimpered. "Come over here with me, Bobby," I said because, and this is what I was thinking, we can do nothing about the past, and our anger, maybe it feeds the cancer. *Puede ser*. "Now lie down on the couch and close your eyes. Take a deep breath."

I was trying to draw the spirits to me, but I was so tired, and Junie had been falling over lately, *es la verdad*, sometimes several times a day. This channeling is not an easy business, no matter what anyone says. But I gathered myself, I opened myself to God or whoever else might be listening, whatever angel, and of course Bobby has his own angels all around him. I rubbed my hands together, warming my palms, and then I laid my hands on him, on his liver and all around it. He was very sick. I called them to help me. I felt their warmth and power, but I knew maybe all I could hope for was to take away the pain. I prayed anyways. I filled my heart with their prayers and my own, and we stayed like that for a while, but none of the doctor spirits entered me. Not one. I always feel like such a failure when this happens, but what can you do?

This I know: there are times when there is no hope for what will happen in this world, where what people have set into motion, the spirits cannot reverse. *Qué será será*, no matter how strong the will. All we can do then is accept the truth for in acceptance there is, sometimes, something as great as peace. Maybe it is faith. *¿Quién sabe?* I don't know. No one knows. All this, I said to him in my thoughts and I know he heard me. We were all quiet, hushed, our hearts on hold, we were trying to pray even though we knew, we all knew, and it was a sad thing. The light was draining from the room. We heard the voices of the children coming home from school, a plane overhead.

"Mi'jo," I said, because I did feel a great love for him, "you have to make a truce with this thing. *Live and let live*. Every night, you tell it this: you will let it live inside you if it will let you live."

"What People Set into Motion, the Spirits Cannot Reverse" is excerpted from *Jillian in the Borderlands: A Cycle of Rather Dark Tales*, forthcoming from Black Lawrence Press in September 2020. Alvarado is the author of three earlier books: *Anxious Attachments*, *Anthropologies*, and *Not a Matter of Love*. Find her online at bethalvarado.com.

THE LAST CLOWN

by Hannah Pass



Today, the children arrive from different grade schools. Meadowbrook Elementary, North Star, Two Rivers and Discovery. Elementary schools on hillsides, beside freeways, near graves. Classrooms taken by fields and by gardens. In the living room, the children circle around me and count off: Edra, Aidan, Emily, Lee and Bradley. The list continues. It goes on.

"Are you all here?"

I tower over them. They blink and gaze up. They have no clue as to who is here and who will never show. On the carpet below, some of them have tied their shoelaces into tightly woven pretzels. My own big soles have begun to wither and tear.

"Is it your birthday, too?" one child asks.

What a doll.

"It's *my* birthday," another child says.

"It *my* birthday too," says another.

Clearly it is every child's birthday. I am good at keeping track. I am organized and ready to dazzle.

The children all close in and inspect me. They tug on my pants. They fiddle the pom-poms on my chest. With my horn, I puff on their faces to repel them.

"We've never seen one of you!" they say.

So I hand them each a balloon the color of frosting and tell them to blow. They put their lips to the rubber and their chests inflate. They exhale and the balloons flap like long cartoon tongues.

"You're all doing great," I say. "Keep it up."

One child blows her balloon into the shape of a rabbit. She hands it to me, pinched at the bottom. I tie it, then release, and the rabbit hops out of my hands. It nibbles the tongue on my shoes and scampers off into the kitchen. The other children are upset. They want rabbits too.

"Not every child can have a rabbit," I say.

Yes, they can! They insist. Every child can have a rabbit.

"No, it's not possible." I pull at my wig and a few thin curls float down to the floor.

One child, who I believe to be Emily, stands up, opens the front door and leaves.

It is a lot of pressure being the clown. The face, itself, becomes a chore. Specialty paint has gone well out of stock, along with the sponges. So, I buy Maybelline for my brightly pigmented lids, my drawn-on smile. Baby powder to make porcelain skin. I can always feel the dust harden as it sets.

It is a lot of pressure.

I hardly wash so as to keep a faint contour of where my lines belong. I am all rainbows and lines. It saves time. To have a pattern and stick with it. My daily planner, my shower caps, my green juice — it's all in effort to get me through an over-booked day.

But none of the children are happy. When I squeeze my horn, they laugh for a beat and then fade. So, I take them outside where there's grass and sunshine. They find this funny, sunshine. The rays, the warmth, it's got them giggling.

"What's so funny?" I ask. I don't get it. I've begun to itch. My fingertips feel dry and calloused. My blue nail polish, flaked.

But the children continue on, their faces red as strawberries. One child in particular, Lee, reveals a gold tooth. The tooth, a perfect sequined-twinkle. He catches me staring and shuts his mouth. "Please, don't mind me," I say. It is always me that does the minding. Lee resembles a younger me, sixty years ago, when I had braces and a soft, thick head of hair. I touch my wig again and more curls trickle on down. I feel around a small bald spot.

Lee walks over. "I'm tired of laughing," he says. "It's so much work."

Which, as of late, seems right. Laughter takes stamina and an impossible amount of truth mixed with gumption. The other day, I had clowned a party of brothers. Brothers only, all the same height who laughed easily, hours on end. Spaghetti, that's what it took. They slurped and paid and shuffled me out the door. Then yesterday, a bash for adults, all in crisp suits. They couldn't stop chuckling at the piñata.

"We can call your mother," I tell Lee. "Would that feel better? To call your mother?"

Lee nods. A mother would make things better. That, and rest. Rest would feel good.

I tie the other children together by their laces and take Lee inside.

In the kitchen, it appears the rabbits have multiplied exponentially. The rationed balloons — apparently, I'd given that child two.

"Holy Moses!" Lee says.

I'm shocked too. The rabbits are on the counter, on the chairs, on the recycling. Their noses pulsing, their tails turned up. Again, one comes for my feet and gnaws. I pick it up, unsure of where to set it down.

Together, Lee and I herd all of the rabbits into the broom closet, which sounds quaint, the broom closet. A lonely place for a broom. We go inside the closet and shut the door.

"Where are your shoes?" Lee asks.

I wiggle my toes. Seemingly, my shoes are gone.

Light cuts in through the cracks. The rabbits huddle around us, on our arms, our laps. I can smell the earth on their backs, the joy in their hearts and again, that darn sun. It is a lot of pressure, I tell Lee. And he agrees. He calls me a new age, for today is my birthday. He honks my nose and it crumbles off into his hands.

Hannah Pass has her MFA from Pacific University and her stories have appeared in *American Short Fiction*, *Wigleaf*, *The Normal School*, *Tin House Online* and *Kenyon Review Online* among other places. She is the author of the chapbook, *Our Reincarnated*, from ELJ Editions, and is currently at work on her first novel. You can find more about her work at hannahpass.com

FROM THE EDITORS



This year, as last year, we talked about how we wanted to finish 2019, the kind of spaces we want to create in the world, and what kind of space we see Shirley being. This is a season of gathering together to keep out the cold and the dark, of deliberately opening doors and welcoming people in. It is important to us as a publication to make sure we set a place at the table for people who are often seated last if at all. That's why we decided again this year to consider only stories by women and gender non-conforming writers for our Winter issue. We're so grateful for all the stories we received, and so excited to share with you these odd, eerie, beautiful stories.

Thank you, as always, for reading,

CB & LP
editors