

GUILD OF YOUNG WRITERS

SHORT
STORIES

POETRY

POETRY PROMPTS

VOLUME #14

FALL

2024

Story Studio Writing Society is located on the traditional territories of the WSÁNEĆ and Lkwungen-speaking peoples. We respectfully acknowledge and thank the Lkwungen People, also known as the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations communities, for allowing us to live, work, learn, play and create on their lands.

Through the work we do on the territory, we are accountable to the following communities: Esquimalt, Songhees, STÁUTW (Tsawout), WJOLELP (Tsartlip), BOKEĆEN (Pauquachin), MÁLEXEŁ (Malahat), WSÍKEM (Tseycum), T'Sou-ke Nation, Scia'new Nation and Nuu-chah-nulth: Pacheedaht Nations.

We acknowledge that the historical relationship to the land and territories of these peoples continues to this day.

As an education based organization, we recognize that we have the responsibility to work towards truth and reconciliation, and to remain open to suggestions, consultations, and partnerships, especially with local Indigenous communities and organizations, on how our organization can continue to work towards reconciliation.

We hope that Story Studio's programing and publications create a safe, welcoming and engaging environment for all people, including Indigenous peoples.

We acknowledge the support of the CRD Arts & Culture Support Service, the City of Victoria Strategic Plan Granting Program. and our generous donors.



CONTENTS

5
Get to Know this
Seasons Authors

24
'Forget Me' Digital
painting & photography
by Raine

25
Poetry Prompts to get
you writing
By Abby



4
Editor's Note

7
Diversify Your Bookshelf
Book Recommendations

9
Entrapula Taisans: Origin of Magic
A short story by Raine

13
The End: Born to but Not Living
Chapter Four, Book Excerpt
by Samantha

18
Poetry
Pieces by Kat, Abby, and Myah

27
The Orchard
A short story by Zia

30
The Apple of Eternity
A short story by Samantha





Editor's Note

It has been invigorating to return to the Guild, and my role with Story Studio after a year away as I welcomed my first child. The growth of the members that I held so dear over the past four years, and the resurgence of new members while I was away is so incredible to see. This community of writers has been inspirational for so many members and for myself and Marja, as well. I am constantly in awe of the dedication they put into their writing and the excitement they bring to learning new skills and taking on new challenges in the craft. We are now a community of over 30 writers across Canada!

These zines allow them a place to share their writing, and build their identity as emerging authors, and I am so grateful to each of our readers for holding that space for them, and encouraging them to continue.

This year will bring some changes as we embark on our fifth year of The Guild of Young Writers, and I look forward to welcoming new members, and guiding our writers to stretch their skills and interests as we welcome new guest authors and others in the field to expand our capabilities and explore new feats in our writing journeys.

Rebecca Ruiter

PROGRAM COORDINATOR



Get to know the Authors

Abby is a 16 year old writer, poet and artist in Victoria. This is their third year being part of the Guild of Young Writers! They enjoy reading, scrolling through Pinterest, singing, learning ASL and cuddling with their dog, Louie and their cats. Abby's love of Man O' Wars comes from their favourite book, Man O' War by Cory McCarthy. They love acting in their school's plays and will be co-directing a film they're helping make this year. They hope to read a lot more this year and create even more art!

Samantha L.D. Martin is a 14 year old historical fiction author and poet.

Hi, I'm Myah and I live in East York, Ontario. I'm a grade 8 student who loves writing and reading. I enjoy writing about fantastical worlds and creating unique characters.

Zia Marlan-Pollner is an eleventh grade student devoted to her passion of writing. When she isn't immersed in her stories, Zia is either reading, studying for IB, or working as a teacher assistant at her local Hebrew school.

Kat Gillese is a woefully unmotivated writer who loves creating hopeful stories and depressing poetry (with the occasional screenplay bridging the gap between the two moods). They aim to someday infiltrate libraries everywhere with their books and achieve world domination in the process.

Raine is a 17 year old musician and author who loves writing about simple day to day life, up to the most fantastical events imaginable, and usually tying his stories to music somehow. He also loves travelling, rhythm games, and languages.



BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

What we're reading and loving these days

*The Pirate and the
Porcelain Girl*

-Emily Riesbeck and N.
J. Barna

*What Unbreakable
Looks Like*

- Kate McLaughlin

*I Who Have Never
Known Men*

-Jacqueline Harpman

Sync

- Ellen Hopkins

Kindling

-Tracy Chee

*Murder Most Unladylike
Series*

- Robin Stevens





Entrapula Taisans

THE ORIGIN OF MAGIC

BY RAINE HERMOSA

Not many people remember when space and time were endless. When the dead were as much part of life as the living. When the past was as close to now as the present. Long ago, our people could explore inside our minds, and venture off into other dimensions. We had the power to do so, to manipulate the fabric of reality, space, and time. It was our blessing.

Life would've been unrecognizable: summoning scenes of the past to solve mysteries, communicating with our subconscious to study the universe, and joining the ghosts of our loved ones here in the living world of Arc-Zentih. There were those who journeyed beyond our plane of existence, to the land of Infinity, in search of far off lands and forgotten eras. Back then, anything you wanted could be found. Anything you sought, called upon.

The more reality was tampered with, the more stress was placed on the planet. There was an imbalance in the energy dispersed throughout the world. Thus, The planet fought back. Massive earthquakes and storms soon ravaged the land. Yet, we were ignorant. To solve a problem caused by magic, we looked for solutions *with* magic.

One group that focused on the crisis at hand was the Academy of Termina, and their leader, Taisha. A powerful presence in the world of astrochronal research, Taisha predicted that the planet was headed towards a state of decay. The only way to survive was to perform major continental repairs, stitching together a broken world on a scale unimaginable. It would only be possible with an immense amount of energy, something that would rival the power the natural world already contained..

To do this, the Academy enlisted help from the Nimbus, winged neighbours on the adjacent island of Junction. Born from the clouds of nebulas, the Nimbus were the ones most familiar with the dark skies above the heavens, and the cold reaches of space where so few have ventured. The Nimbus would take Taisha up to their temple in the sky, to the clear pool of Andromeda, at the lagrange point between the sun and Arc-Zenith. She would then reach forth towards the world, absorbing all the magical energy that had circled and permeated the planet.


Back on the ground, people began to grow weak and frightened as the energy that guided their life suddenly vanished. Cities turned to chaos, as people slowly lost contact with the spirits of the past, and could no longer see into their memories. Those who travelled to Infinity seemed lost to time, unless they could resurface on their own.

One day, Taisha began to glow, and her brilliant silhouette was visible in the sky. People could see that she was beginning to grow unstable, as magic energy began to shoot back from space towards the Arc-Zenith. Taisha's mind was warped out of shape, the memories and dreams of millions of people flowing through her. The Nimbus would end up having to defend the planet, creating points of gravity to absorb the bursts of energy. Yet, the outcome was already inevitable.

Even as a master of Termina, her body could not contain the energy she had consumed. The Nimbus around her knew that she would eventually burst, but no one could get close enough to shut her down. Although in a distorted state of consciousness, Tara was able to sense when the magic was going to overflow. In a bid to save the planet, she shot a wave of light at the Arc-Zenith, pushing the planet off into space. She fell into the sun, igniting a massive supernova seen across the galaxy.

In that explosion, the magic absorbed in the entrapulation rained back onto the planet as it flew off into the galaxy. This substance, which we now call the Mutlichronozate, cemented itself into the devastated landscape. Its power enabled us to live without a sun, and in complete darkness for many years, until our Zenith-Spire was built. In that time, people learned to manipulate the Multichronozate, which eventually split into the branches of magic known as Radiance, Firmament, Locus and Anima.

In our time, we remain light years away from our home star system, but it can still be seen in the skies at night. The star-remnant Taisans in the Entirical Constellation, is Taisha's final resting place.



“Storytelling is important because as far as I’m concerned this is the most valuable of human technologies. This is the most human thing we have to offer one another. Human beings are most influential to other human beings. Nothing influences us more than each other. So the more we share our stories the more whole we will be collectively. And we’ll realize that we are not actually all that different.”

– Jason Reynolds

SHARE
YOUR
STORY



THE END: BORN TO BUT NOT LIVING

AN EXCERPT

BY SAMANTHA L.D. MARTIN

READ THE FIRST 3 CHAPTERS OF SAMANTHA'S
STORY IN OUR SPRING & SUMMER ISSUES

Chapter Four: Engagement

My eyes refuse to focus as I stare blurringly at the rack of guns being quickly surrounded by men. I am exhausted from the night before, even though I had stayed up to celebrate the stroke of midnight with my family, memories of earlier that day tainted my mood. I honestly don't see the point in celebrating the New Year anymore, it's just another year of a senseless war.

By now, more people have joined the shooting station, much to the dismay of Buzz cut and Broad, who had thought being the only two people there was an award larger than promotion. The young man who had the gun pointed at him is still trying to lift the weights but the man who passed out, now stands next to me, staring at the bullet-worn targets. Watching silently a puff of a dismayed sigh escapes as the others grab their guns, load and fire in the same tired rhythm, some efficiently others struggling. I don't dare grab one, not after yesterday. I can still see that poor Jewish man's skull in the targets the men fire bullet after bullet at.

Even the memory makes me want to puke again, and in turn, causes me to remember the conversation between Major Förstner and Lieutenant Beiler. Last night after training I had gone straight to my room, I didn't even stop to talk to Avila or Freida. Mother had knocked on my door a few times then left while Father just spoke to me through it. I didn't leave for any of them. How could I? I was ill. The stress of my situation had seeped into my very soul and still I find myself standing in the training base.



I can hear Förstner and Beiler discussing my emotionally reserved state and what to do faintly in the background. Beiler's voice is loud and quick, filled with fluctuations while Förstner is calm and monotonous, almost bored sounding. I can't make out the exact conversation due to the gunshots next to me and I can't help but feel like that is exactly what they want.

Buzz cut and Broad are off in a corner criticizing the others, their gazes flickering from me to Major Förstner, still bitter about yesterday. I can't care less. I don't want to be a good shot and it isn't like I asked to be here, there is no need to be jealous or mad at me. I don't want to be here as much as they don't want me here.

An hour passes and I still haven't picked up a rifle, haven't fired a shot, haven't even taken a step near the target. Major Förstner walks over to me, a small envelope clutched in his hand. He attempts to smile softly at me but once again his eyes betray him. I come to attention stiffly.

"Müller, Lieutenant Beiler tells me you haven't continued shooting." Förstner says, raising a thin brow.

I break his glance. "No sir, not yet..."

"Hm. No matter, here," he hands me the envelope.

I take it and stare at Förstner blankly. "What's this?"

Förstner's eyes sparkle dangerously. "Just open it Müller,"

It's clear he fully knows what's in this envelope and it only ticks me off that he is pretending to not. I open it shakily and scan the contents.

Arranged Marriage Proposal:

Friedrich Wolfgang Müller
&
Irmina Heidi Hirsch

This marriage is non-negotiable and will be carried out in the near future.

Thank you.

My breath feels cold and my eyes widen in shock.

An arranged marriage?! Non-negotiable!? What the heck is going on? Who issued this?

I am frozen in place and Förstner stares at me, a small smirk on his lip.

"Is something wrong, Müller?" He asks, his voice smooth and controlled.

Controlled is the perfect word for this, he is controlling my life... Does he seriously think that giving me a wife will convince me to kill people? Maybe their thoughts are that if I have a larger family I will kill for them. They can't be more wrong, if anything having a wife will make me refuse to kill even more.

I make eye contact with Major Förstner. "No sir." I pause. "Sir, May I ask how you obtained this?"

Something in Förstner's eyes flickers but his face remains the same. "It came in the mail, one of the other soldiers saw it had your name on it and brought it to me. What does it say?"

You know damn well what it says. I clench my jaw. "It's a marriage proposal."

Förstner's smirk deepens. "Oh, is that so?"

"Yes sir," I try my best to keep my tone relaxed but I find it becoming deeper involuntarily the more I stare into Förstner's smirking face.

"Congratulations are in order then I suppose," He drawls, raising his left brow arching.

Another soldier walks over to us and salutes the Major. "Herr Major, there is a *Fraüline Hirsch at the front entrance. Shall I let her in?"

Major Förstner nods and the soldier runs off. It takes me a moment to connect the dots. The Fraüline at the gate was none other than my arranged wife. The sound of heels clacking on wood approaches and the scent of floral perfume stops behind me. My heart sinks.

"Herr Müller?" A soft, sweet, voice calls.

I spin around to see this arranged wife. I stumble a bit when I see her. She is... Gorgeous... Her dirty blonde hair tumbles delicately over her shoulders in loose waves that frames her face beautifully. Her deep brown eyes stare woefully into mine. My breath hitches and my face flushes a deep red.

"I- uh- yeah- that's me... Are uh- you... Fraüline Hirsch...?" I stammer.

She raises her chin playfully so her eyelids half close. A smile plays on her shiny peach coloured lips as she walks over to me. "Please, call me Irmina," she whispers, running a hand along my arm.

I jump. Her touch is electric.

I swallow the lump in my throat. "F- Friedrich... Call me Friedrich... Then, Irmina..."

She pulls herself closer to me. "Don't mind if I do," she plays with the uniform buttons on my chest. "You look so handsome in this uniform, Friedrich."

"T- thank you... Fraüline..."

"No no, Irmina, remember?"

I break her gaze. "Right... Irmina..."

Major Föstner's eyes crinkle into a smile and Lieutenant Beiler is watching from the shooting station.

"It seems you two are getting along," Föstner smirks. Both Irmina and I ignore him and he just laughs. "Müller, how about you and Fraüline Hirsch go off and do something together, don't worry about your training for today, you can always pick up the rifle again tomorrow."

"Mhm, thanks," I mutter as I stare into Irmina's eyes.

"Haha, of course Müller. You're young, may as well live like it." The Major waves his hand dismissively. "Now off you go, don't leave a lady waiting."

Irmina, who is still holding onto me, smiles. My face goes red again and I nod. Irmina and I walk out of the building and the other men stare enviously. This time I don't blame them. When we step into the parking lot I don't see any car nor bike that wasn't there the past few days. Did Irmina walk or get dropped off? No matter. I lead her to my car and help her in, however after stepping into the driver's seat I realize I have no clue where to take her.

"So uh... where do you want to go...?" I ask.

Irmina smiles. "What about the movies? That always seems to be a good first date."

I nod my head in agreement. "The movies? Okay, what's playing right now?"

Irmina laughs. "I don't know, but who cares..." she leans over to me. "I have a feeling we won't even be watching half the time," she puts a finger to my lips and smirks.

My face goes red. "Oh... um..."

She giggles. "Start the car Freidrich,"

"Right..."

I quickly start the car and we drive away towards the movies. I can feel her gaze on me and it makes it immensely hard to focus on the road, *What is wrong with me? I can't focus on anything...*

I park the car in front of the movie theatre and stare nervously at Irmina before snapping back to my senses. I quickly get out and run to the other side of the car to open the door for her. She smiles as she takes my hand and I lead her into the theatre.

"Two tickets for whatever is playing please," I tell the ticket lady.

"Of course, here you are," she smiles softly.

Irmina grabs my arm and takes her ticket as we walk in.

The theatre is large with a high ceiling and a screen in front of rows of fabric lined chairs, screwed to the floor. There are a few people here already, primarily young couples. I still don't know what is playing but Irmina pulls me into a seat. My face is warm as her hands wander all over me and her face so dangerously close to mine. I hear the whir of the film starting but I am not looking at the screen, Irmina and I are too busy looking at each other. Part of me wants to kiss her, the other part is terrified. Is she working with Förstner and Beiler or does she actually want to marry me?

The movie begins and it seems to be some sort of romantic war propaganda, the latter of which I have zero interest in, the first part however aligns perfectly with my situation. As the couple on the screen kiss, Irmina's breath is hot on my ear and her arms wrap around my body. I can't move as my face heats up rapidly, along with other things. Irmina senses this and moves her face closer to me, now her lips are in line with mine. She is on my left side and I am still facing forward, too paralysed to look at her. Irmina gently turns my head to face her and she presses her lips onto my mouth.

A soft grunt of surprise escapes my lips as my eyes widen.

When she pulls away smiles. "I knew you would be perfect,"

"W- what...?" I stammer, my face even redder and hair a mess.

My heart thuds loudly in my ears and I can feel my pulse in every part of my body. Irmina opens her mouth to answer my question but her eyes flick to a man in a black Gestapo uniform, who walks by in an almost bored strut, his eyes scanning the rows lazily. They make eye contact and Irmina quickly looks away.

What the...

Irmina quickly pulls back to me, hiding her face. I stare at her in shock.

"Irmina... What are you doing...?" I ask.

"Gestapo..." she whispers.

My face pales. If she is hiding from the Gestapo does that mean...

"Irmina do you not —"

"Shh!" She hisses as she pulls herself closer to me.

The Gestapo man lingers for a bit, his eyes scanning Irmina before writing something in a small black notebook. Irmina shakes gently in my arms and I watch the Gestapo agent from the corner of my eye. After what feels like eternity he walks away.

I nudge Irmina gently, "He's gone..."

She pulls away, her hair is a mess and her face is pale. It becomes clear to me.

Irmina is terrified of the Gestapo, but then again who isn't? But her level of fear is to the point she feels the need to hide... does that mean...

I swallow hard. Irmina has to be hiding for a reason, so either she is under suspicion for not agreeing with Hitler or the Gestapo is after her already. The words form on my tongue but I dare not utter it aloud. For now the burning question has to stay in my mind.

Is my future wife a rebel spy?

**Watch for another excerpt from
The End: Born to but Not Living in the next
issue of our Zine.**



A serene landscape featuring a body of water in the foreground, reflecting the surrounding environment. In the background, there are tall reeds and other vegetation. The water's surface is calm, creating clear reflections of the sky and the plants. The overall atmosphere is peaceful and natural.

Poetry

BRIDGE TO SEPTEMBER

Adrift in the passenger seat
I look back through the rearview window
and see summer fading away
the bridge goes on and on
across the strip of ocean
between summer and September

our car is going in one direction
forwards never back
but i will look back
to summer to belonging to before

I roll the window down
and feel the ocean's breath on my neck
carefree days are ending
tide chasing and shell collecting
living for the joy of it

I will wave my goodbyes
through the wind
till summer's isle fades to nothing

the ocean's spray burns my eyes
as the setting sun blurs the horizon
and I can't look away

the gap of water is unswimmable
the shores of summer a hundred years
away
and I can't look away

I can't erase the joys of yesterday
what September holds
I don't really want to know

I want to keep dreaming
pretending that summer will never end
but the mainland is approaching
my island a strip of red on endless blue

if I could stop this car I would
I would stop time if I could

but the world is spinning by too fast
I'll keep waving as if it will bring summer
back
as if September isn't around the bend
as if summer's reverie isn't about to end

but I can't look away
because I know that one day
when I look back through the rearview
window
summer will be long gone

Myah Rathi Litteljohn



THE HARVEST

Soon we'll feel the pull of the
Harvest and we'll understand our
Length of prose, thrifted converse
Scattered on the floor, scratches
Left by wind slinking under the door,
when the
Harvest comes, we'll know
The meaning of gratitude
And we'll hope we chose the
Right seeds to sow

Embroidery hooped on stumps of
Trees, moss weaving with
Leaves, the fall of the foliage no longer
Green, but falling red, orange, yellow and
Brown upon the earth, reclaiming its
Birth and renewing its soil, the Harvest
Takes and gives back in perfect
Harmony

Hear the ear itch of kettles
Boiling, water for tea or liquid to
Coil, hot cocoa or cider, warm
Mugs all around, pumpkin spice
Kinds of lattes, the Harvest abundance
Abounds

Soft books, coarse pages, all
Memorials repurposed, remains
Remaining but far from their cemeteries
Their ink no longer sap, it bleeds
It heeds cozy tales to read
We know death comes hand in
Hand with the Harvest

Cold flames flickering upon
Hot golden candles, dripping the walls of
Bee hives and wicks of pearly
Twine, a perfect light for sight of the
Night before the Harvest, all hallows
Eve, the perfect handcrafted fire to
Find ourselves, to see

Dried citrus slices strung
Twinkling fairy lights are hung
Baking cinnamon buns and pies
Beneath the setting sun, the clouds
Darken the sky as black crows
Fly and the home is full of smells of
All the bounty that has been baked
To feast upon when comes
The Harvest

Cozy blankets, pillows and
Popcorn, moving pictures for
Entertainment and fun, for chills and
Thrills, sometimes only for vibes
Perfect for days when outside
Is tainted by rainy skies, and
Black cats seek refuge in where its
Warm, cuddle companions found where
Fire is born

The Harvest is upon us and
We offer it with embraces, grinning
Faces wrapped in scarves and sweaters,
Touques and boots and worn tartan
Blazers, through apple orchard and
Pumpkin patch, fresh batches of
Treats and costumed creatures
Lining the streets, no tricks from the
Harvest, only good things to eat, a
Bountiful gathering of friends,
Family, and community, the
Carved eyes of the lanterns
Watch over the young
Our kin in the sky finds trinkets
Littered around when the evening's done
The Harvest tides us over as it
Always has, and our seeds have grown
Stronger as we step onto
New paths.

-Kat Gillese

LITTLE GHOST

Little ghost
Alone on their boat
No friends in sight, and no
Memory of home...
How did they come here?
Were they ever somewhere
Else? A lantern on the
Bow, and nonetheless a
A smile upon their
Undead complexion
Waiting in the darkness
To find some else
Who may know how to
Return

Little ghost
Their ghost skin stained with red
Their reflection in the water almost
Seems to have bled in
The lantern light on the water,
Painting it like the paper
Lanterns that hung between alleys
Not so unfamiliar
Almost an image of themselves
They just can't remember
What the memory's
About

Little ghost
A grey figure appears, drifting
Over the surf and stopping
Near the edge of the boat
Requesting a seat
The grey ghost tells the
Red what they've lost at
Sea, and suddenly like
A tidal wave, what happened comes
Back, and little ghost is
Shaking like they've had a heart
Attack

Little ghost
Knowing more than they
Wish, they boat still
Afloat, but they know
They did not, the grey
Ghost lends comfort as the
Two pass the time, they've been
Lost at sea for longer but still
Remember how hard it can
Be, the two sit gentle as they're
Rocked in the boat, and as the
Oil burns out, they hear the
Lantern's last note
Will they ever find home?
Will they make one for themselves?
Little ghost only knows
They won't be alone

-Kat Gillese

BELOVED

I really want to understand
I want to understand
I want to know you and be able to love you even
if it's just friendship for 8 months
Because I hate you
So much for talking about leaving and then
expecting me to not react
I feel things
My heart aches
And I hate that I'm gonna miss you
And that you're leaving
And I'm so done
Feeling like I don't matter enough for you to
pause and think about me
And I hate that I'm saying think about me!
Obviously I want you to feel okay to talk around
me but I can't
I can't hear about the uni plans
Your new found religion
That warped my mind and you know
It haunts me to this day
You're talking about a lifetime
Holy water
Holy land
Across the ocean
New land new life new friends new school new
you
How can I not fit into that?
How can I not when we were planning apartments
for 19 and 20 and cottages a decade from now
and how can that not happen
There's no dog
No bird
No poetry book
But I want to write one
But I'm scared to do it because you are the one
that first popped it into my head
And how can I be okay
When I can't and won't ever be able to
understand your identity?
It bugs me
It might mean what I'm most scared of:
That I don't know you
And we won't ever know each other
You were my world

My hope
My future
My art
You were a part of my life
And now
New information
Makes me feel like you will be just that
Just one part of my life
There
And then gone
With ferry boats
And complicated feelings
And future sunk deep
What happened to forever?
Always?
I love you?
But I don't can't won't
Stop caring about you
Even after you leave at the end of this
year
We might never become friends again
Never beloveds
Never bible study partners
You won't be my partner
And I think I'm most sad
That you don't mind

Abby Hawthorne

'Forget Me'



By Raine

POETRY

Use these prompts as inspiration to start a new poem, or use the line within a poem.

I WANT YOUR
ROUGH DRAFT

WHAT'S BEHIND
YOUR EYES

SOMEONE IS
WRITING ABOUT
YOU

LOSS IS PROOF THERE
WAS LOVE

WHAT DO YOU
WANT TO
REMEMBER AND
WHAT DO YOU
WANT TO NEVER
FORGET

REMEMBER WHAT IT
MEANS TO THINK LIKE A
HUMAN BEING

WHEN I THINK OF THE
REASONS YOU LOVE ME I
HAVE TO MAKE IT PAST
TENSE

DANDELION SEED
WISHES

I TAKE COMFORT WE
SLEEP UNDER THE
SAME STARS EVEN FAR
APART

SURROUNDED
BY FAIRY LIGHT

PROMPTS

LOVING YOU IS
LIKE FINDING A
NEW PAIR OF
LUNGS AND
BREATHING DEEP

A SATELLITE OF
CONNECTION

FREEZE-FRAME
SHOTS OF...

YOU CAN BE KIND TO
YOU EVEN IF THE
WORLD WON'T

WHAT IF LOVE
ISN'T ABOUT
FOREVER

LIFE IS TOO SHORT NOT
HAVE CHEESE
SOMETIMES

SACRED TEXTS ON
POST-IT-NOTES

ONE OF OUR
MYTHOLOGIES

EACH PIECE OF YOU
DRAWN OUT,
REWRITTEN

DAUGHTERS OF
MEMORY

The Orchard

Flash Fiction by Zia Marlan-Pollner

I used to ask for piggyback rides just so I could run my fingers through my mother's hair. Indoors, it was a dull, earthy orange, but drowned in light, it glowed like a radiant beam of fire. That color was my childhood wonder.

She used to take me to the apple orchard every Sunday. She'd put my hair in pigtails and do hers to match. "I want to look like you, Mommy," I'd say. I was a fifth her height and a pudgy little thing, and my hair was blonde, but our smiles were the same. I'd ride on my perch, taller than I'd ever hope to be when full grown, and she'd lift me high, high above her head until my fingers grazed the leaves. Our purpose on these trips was never to pick apples. It was a quest to find the perfect one: round, ripe, and gorgeously red.

I loved to inhale that sweet, honeyed orchard smell. The bees buzzed about and landed on our freckled arms, tickling us like feathers. I was scared of bees, but here, we were all one. The trees, their roots, the soft breeze, the insects, the mud, the dome of blue above, my mother, and me. We'd search and search for hours on end, until dusk flooded the sky, yet all the apples were either slightly misshapen, bruised, or discolored. The orchard was toying with us, keeping that perfect apple hidden, enjoying the game. I think a part of me was glad. A part of me hoped we'd never find it.

The apples we brought home and ate were from the supermarket. My mother taught me how to make applesauce, apple pie, apple crumble, and, when fruit flies littered our apartment, apple cider vinegar. It was a long and arduous process, and I hated the smell. We'd set it out and watch the flies slowly fall into our trap. My mother always grimaced at the sight of the corpses floating in the liquid. She believed everything alive had a soul.

Yesterday, she brought me her special apple pie. We ate it together and shared some with the nurse, too. It dissolved on my tongue and bathed my taste buds in a rich, sweet cinnamon-apple splendor. She sat with me on my bed and told me stories. It was then that I realized how old she'd grown. Time had carved deep lines into her face. Her hair was streaked with gray and her eyes were heavy and sad.

"Mama, it's Sunday," I told her. A smile gleamed in her eyes.

It had been a few years since we'd come to the orchard, yet it looked exactly as it had all my childhood. Rows upon rows of blossoming trees, apples clinging to their branches, fallen ones sinking wedges into the soil. Drops of dew clinging like tears to the green grass.

She pushed me slowly down the endless rows. My hands grazed the ground. I was lower than I'd ever been as a child. From the angle at which I turned to look up at her, the sun was crowning her hair in gold. That beautiful orange came to life once again as the final drops of sunlight flooded through the trees.

A small smile on my lips, I gazed up and watched the leaves overhead sweep by. And then, there among the green foliage, something caught my eye.

With my mother's help, I lifted myself and reached up, up into the tree and pulled from it a huge, bulging apple. It was the most peculiar one I'd ever seen, shaped as though a smaller apple had merged with another and together they'd become one. I could barely fit it in both hands. It reminded me, strangely, of my mother and of myself.

I wondered why my mother had persisted all my childhood in searching for perfection. She must've known no such thing existed. Perfection was a trap we'd created. But this odd, tumorous apple, it was my anomaly. It was mine.

"Mama," I said, holding it up to her eyes, "We can stop searching now."



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BY SAMANTHA MARTIN

As the wind brushes my face the scent of sweet ripe apples hits my nose, crisp and tantalizing. The field is large with only evergreens standing tall and marching up the emerald grounds. There is no rhyme or reason for the scent of apples to be in the air as there is not an apple tree in sight, but still, the smell lingers.

The wind's whispering past my ears is high and pleasant as if hinting at faint sounds and syllables of words. I let myself be pulled by the invisible magnetic aura, closing my eyes to hear the whispering of the wind's faint voice clearer. With my eyes still closed I let the wind guide me, surprisingly I don't crash, almost like the forest is stepping aside for me.

Finally, something within me tells me to stop. I come to a halt, my feet brushing against the forest floor and kicking up dust that lingers to my nose. I open my eyes and gasp. I am now in a large field adorned with golden and red-leaved trees, shimmering golden apples on each end of the branches. Birds sing in the trees and even though it's only slightly crisp and warm enough for me to get away with only wearing a light hoodie, there is frost on the grass beneath my feet.

"Welcome mortal," a voice rings from the trees, melodious, sweet, and androgynous.

I spin around. "Who are you? Where am I?"

"You are in the Forest of Enigma, mortal." The voice responds. "It seems my dear friend Ventus, or as you would know him, The Wind, has brought you here on one of his typical whims."

"The Wind?" I ask. "Are you the forest?"

A charming laugh echoes past the thick tree trunks and a comforting warm atmospheric wind floods through. "No no, I am not the forest itself. I merely watch over it."

“Do you have a body?” I arch a brow and look around a few tree trunks.

“Yes, I do have a body, but you won’t see it unless I want you to. Or, when you need to.” The voice responds.

“When I need to? Why would I need to?”

Another smooth laugh reverberates through the forest. “You shall know when the time is right, young mortal.”

I nod slowly and sit down on the frost-sheeted ground, and to my surprise, it isn’t wet. “So do you have a name? Like Ventus does?”

“I do, I have one for aeons, though hardly any mortals have called me by it.” There is a pause in the forest before the hum of the voice starts again. “I have been called Saltus.”

“Saltus,” I repeat, trying the name in my tongue. “So, Saltus why am I here?”

“Because young one, you have been chosen. From my domain you may pick but one gift.” Saltus’s voice hums excitedly through the trees as three glowing orbs appear in front of me.

“You have three options. The first, Water from the River of Knowledge,” the first glowing orb fades, replaced by a vial of shimmering water. “The second, Bark and Sap from the tree of Strength and Fortune,” the second orb fades and a slat of bark topped with honey-like sap floats in the air. “And lastly, the third. The apple of eternity.”

My eyes widen as the third orb fades. There, between the bowl of water and slat of bark is a large, plump, golden apple. It gleams in the sunlight and my eyes find their way up to the red tree tops where the very same golden apples hang at the ends of each sturdy limb.

“What does the Apple of Eternity do?” I query, my gaze still fixed on the gold-laden fruit.

“Ah, the Apple of Eternity, a gift that pleases many a mortal.” Saltus’s tone changes ever so slightly. “The Apple will grant you immortal life. You won’t be able to get sick, nor will you be able to die. Unless of course, you ask for the powers removed by me.”

I keep staring at the floating apple. “Why would I want it removed?”

Saltus sighs. “You ask many questions, mortal... But do you truly seek the answers?”

“Pardon?”

There’s a pause before Saltus speaks again. “Would you like the apple?”

I nod. “Yes, I would.”

“Very well,” Saltus says with a sigh.

The other two gifts fade back into orbs and dissolve while the apple floats over to me. It lands perfectly into my palms and I stare at it.

“Do I eat it?”

“Yes,” Saltus responds.

I nod and stare at the golden fruit. I shakily lift it to my mouth and bite down. I half expect it to be hard and shatter my teeth, but the skin splits with ease and the juice flows into my mouth. My eyes widen as I comprehend the taste. It’s better than any other apple I’ve had before in every way. Sweeter, crisper, more flavourful.

A hum tremors through my body, and my limbs feel weightless. Something inside me shifts and a warm but pleasant burn ripples from where the bite apple sits in my stomach.

“Your mortal essence is fading,” Saltus tells me, their voice still heavy and laden with an unpleased tinge.

I close my eyes once more and let the feeling wash over me. The amount of air going into my lungs seems to expand and I feel stronger. I am truly immortal now.

“There you go,” Saltus whispers. “All done. Ventus will lead you out of the forest now, and remember, if you ever want it reversed, find me.”

I nod and smile, still not understanding why anyone would want this reversed. “Thanks, Saltus!”

As I let Ventus lead me back to the emerald clearing. We depart and as the hours blur, the days follow. Once days start to feel like hours, weeks feel like days. Finally, nearly 200 years later, I am left standing in the emerald field once again. I haven’t aged, but everyone I knew has and long since passed.

Tears roll down my cheeks as planes fly overhead and snap the peaceful silence, dead tree stumps scatter the rolling hills where evergreens once stood, and industrialization is visible in the distance. The world has changed so much, yet I have changed not at all.

The smell of apples is still there, but instead of alluring, it’s now teasing and cruel. The wind blows in a sharp matter that bypasses thick winter coats and pricks needles of chills into your bones.

The wind shifts slightly and Ventus swirls around me. His magnetic pull is lesser now as if he too has aged. I close my eyes and let him lead me once more, but this time when I open my eyes I am no longer in the surreal and pleasant forest... But a graveyard.

A tall man with tousled hair and a weary expression awaits by one of the graves. He is dressed from head to toe in multiple layers of different shades of dark green and his dark green eyes are dulled and sad.

He looks up to me. “So you came back after all... I did tell you.”

My heart flips. “Saltus...?”

He nods. “That is I. I trust you enjoyed your choice in the Apple of Eternity?”

A knot tied in my stomach. I watched everyone I loved die, I watched the world change, cities rise and fall, and so, so, much more.

“It was... Good at first... Not getting sick and being able to not worry about death...” I swallow. “But when the people I knew started dying... And then the world changed... I can’t handle it anymore... C- can you take it away?”

“You no longer wish to be immortal?” Saltus asks, arching a high brow.

“Yes. Please, I don’t want this,” I beg.

Saltus takes a step back and I notice the grave he was standing next to... Is just a pit with a headstone. My body jolts with anticipation and my limbs tingle as I take a step forwards.

“I wish you didn’t have to join the others...” Saltus sighs, stopping me in my tracks.

“Others?”

Saltus gestures vaguely to the rest of the graveyard. “They all made the same choice as you. The Apple of Eternity.”

My mouth goes dry. “Then... Why...”

“Why do I still offer it?” Saltus interrupts. “To test human will. Every time I hope someone will choose the Bark and Sap, or the Water, but no. They always choose the Apple...”

A heaviness weighs down on me. So many people are blinded by the thought of being invincible that they drive themselves to a miserable grave. And now here I am.

Saltus stares at me with his weary dark green eyes. “You can keep living to want people, or-“

“No. No, I don’t want to do that,” I shake my head.

“Very well, but just know, if you give yourself relief, this cycle continues, and the graveyard grows.”

I nod again at Saltus. “I’m aware... But please... Let me step into the grave...”

Saltus nods and Ventus swirls around my feet as I walk to the edge of the grave. I lower myself in, lie down, and close my eyes. Never to open them again. I feel my immortal essence fade, the burning I felt now replaced by a chilling cold. With a gasp, I take my last breath. Ending just another part of the cycle, doomed to repeat once again.



am Giggsfaktung
 am wichtigsten Cuzung' in d' Vormund
 Juli 1830
 abt anjafstun. Giggsfaktung' beffung
 Rappoldsdorf, am 16^{ten} März
 Gung & Wung' Cuzung'
 am wichtigsten Cuzung' in d' Vormund
 Juli 1830

Savarese alla vaniglia
 Preparare la crema con tre
 libbre di zucchero, e un qua
 nto di latte e profumo di vaniglia
 bollire, e aggiungere appena
 bollire, e aggiungere appena

a custard with
 1/2 pint milk
 1/2 pint sugar, whip
 cream till
 thick in 2 tablespoons
 chopped bananas,
 1/2 pint cherry
 gelatine dissolved
 in 1/2 gill water. Mix
 together, when begin
 to stiffen pour into
 buttered mould lined
 with split banana
 sponge fingers (split
 let stand till cold
 to serve

-A.Y.
 La cuisson à l'eau.
 On met à l'eau
 les légumes bouillante (saler)
 la viande frais
 les pâtes et les
 les œufs

We are writers, my love,
 we don't cry, we bleed on paper



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