

mermaids monthly

Issue #3 - March 2021

Baz Kanold - Brigit Truex - David Bowles
Grainne Quinlan - Jennifer Hudak - Katherine Garcia Ley
Karen Porter Sorensen - Nivedita Sekar - Sara Eileen Hames

mermaids monthly

a magazine about mermaid stuff. that's it. that's the shell.

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Mermaids Monthly is a magazine all about mermaids. Happy mermaids, murderous mermaids; mermaids, merdudes, mermxs – maybe even a few highly confused manatees. Any cool aquatic chimeras that you could ever possibly think of with any and every fin color and combination. To subscribe, visit mermaidsmonthly.com.

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- heck

This month you'll find as well as the comic about nine takes on mermaids secrets and being seen as well as an interview you'll find starting on page 3. Also in this issue art from **Baz Kanold** and **Sara Rivedita Sekar** created **Gileen Hames** that is the cover art for this month stuff of all kinds of dreams.



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MERMAID

NIVEDITA SEKAR



IT'S THE TAIL END OF SUMMER WHEN YOU MOVE



IT'S A NEW APARTMENT COMPLEX WITH AN OLD,
TUCKED AWAY FOUNTAIN - A STATUE IN THE MIDDLE.
A MERMAID TOO ANGULAR TO BE BEAUTIFUL



YOU SPEND
A LOT OF
EVENINGS
BY THE
FOUNTAIN





WHEN YOU'RE NOT LOOKING



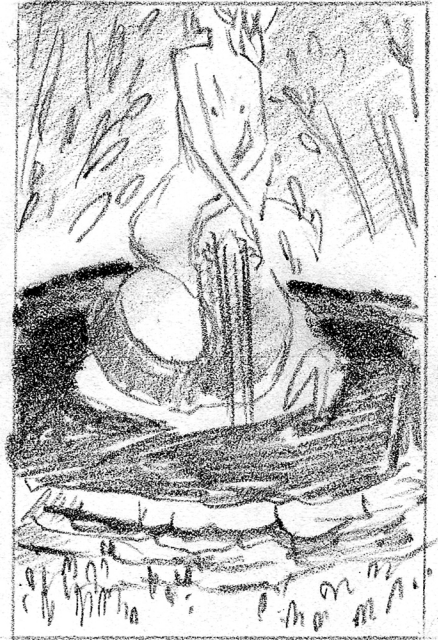
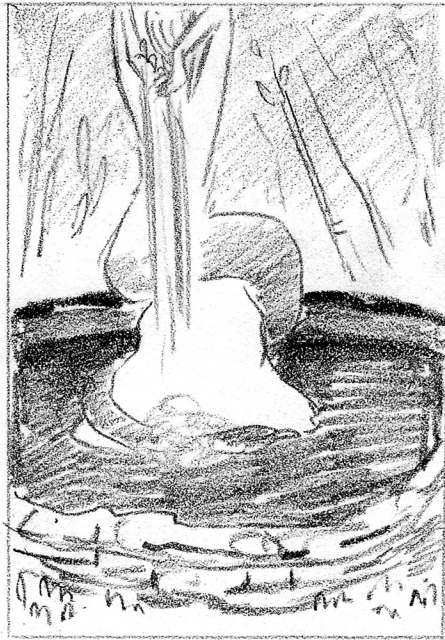
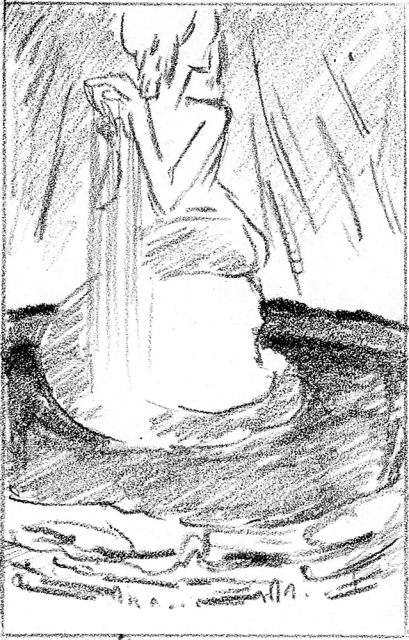


THE MERMAID SAYS, SURFACING

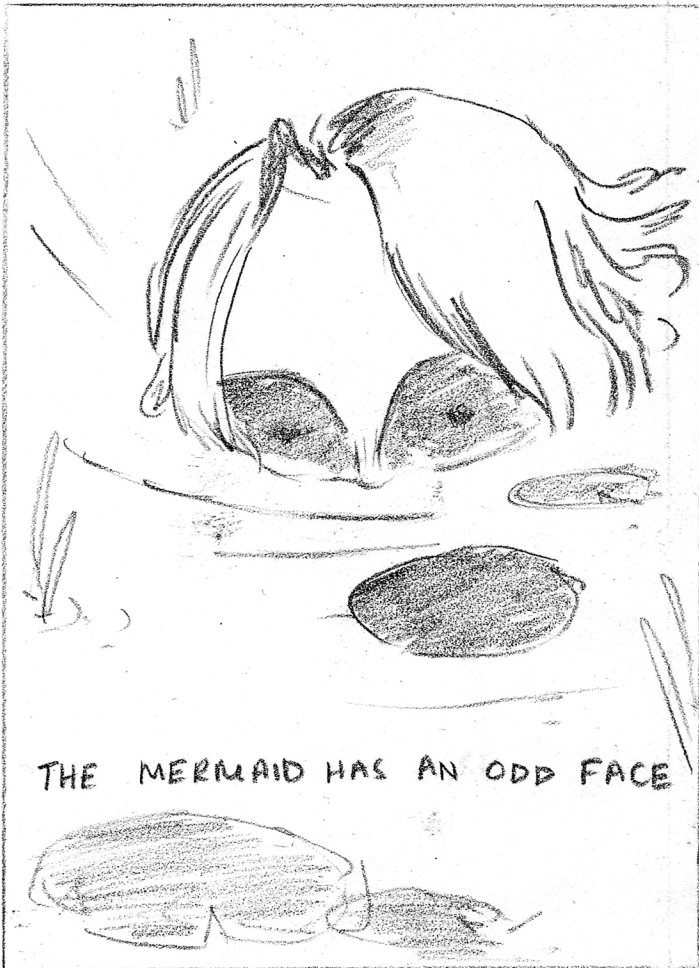


" DON'T BE SAD "

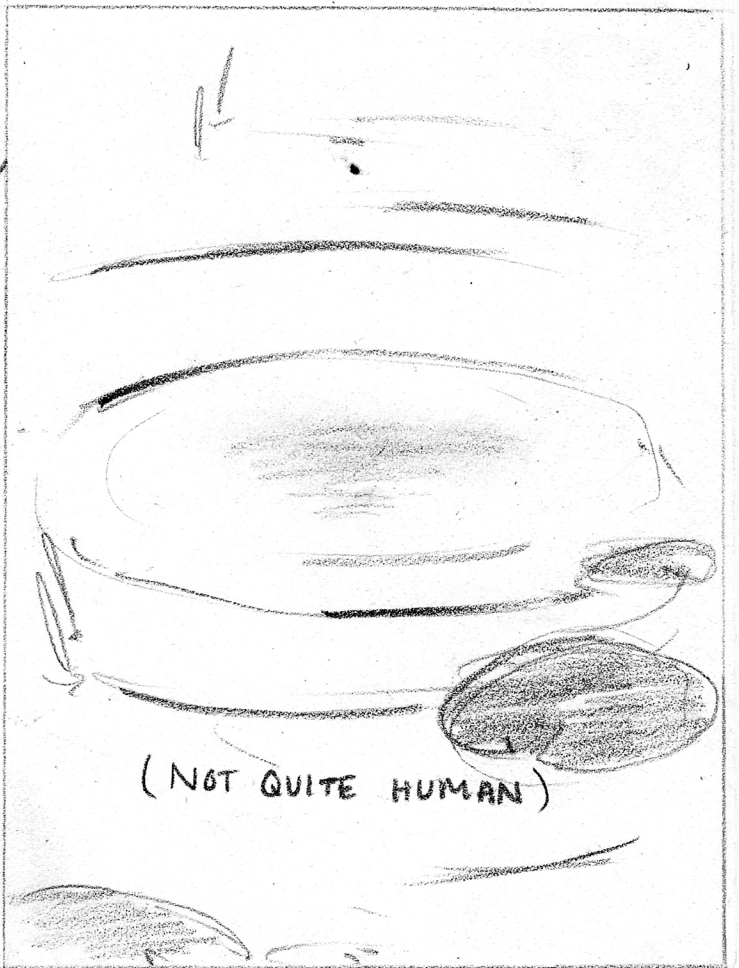
EVERY MORNING YOU CHECK TO SEE IF SHE'S STILL THERE



SHE IS



THE MERMAID HAS AN ODD FACE



(NOT QUITE HUMAN)

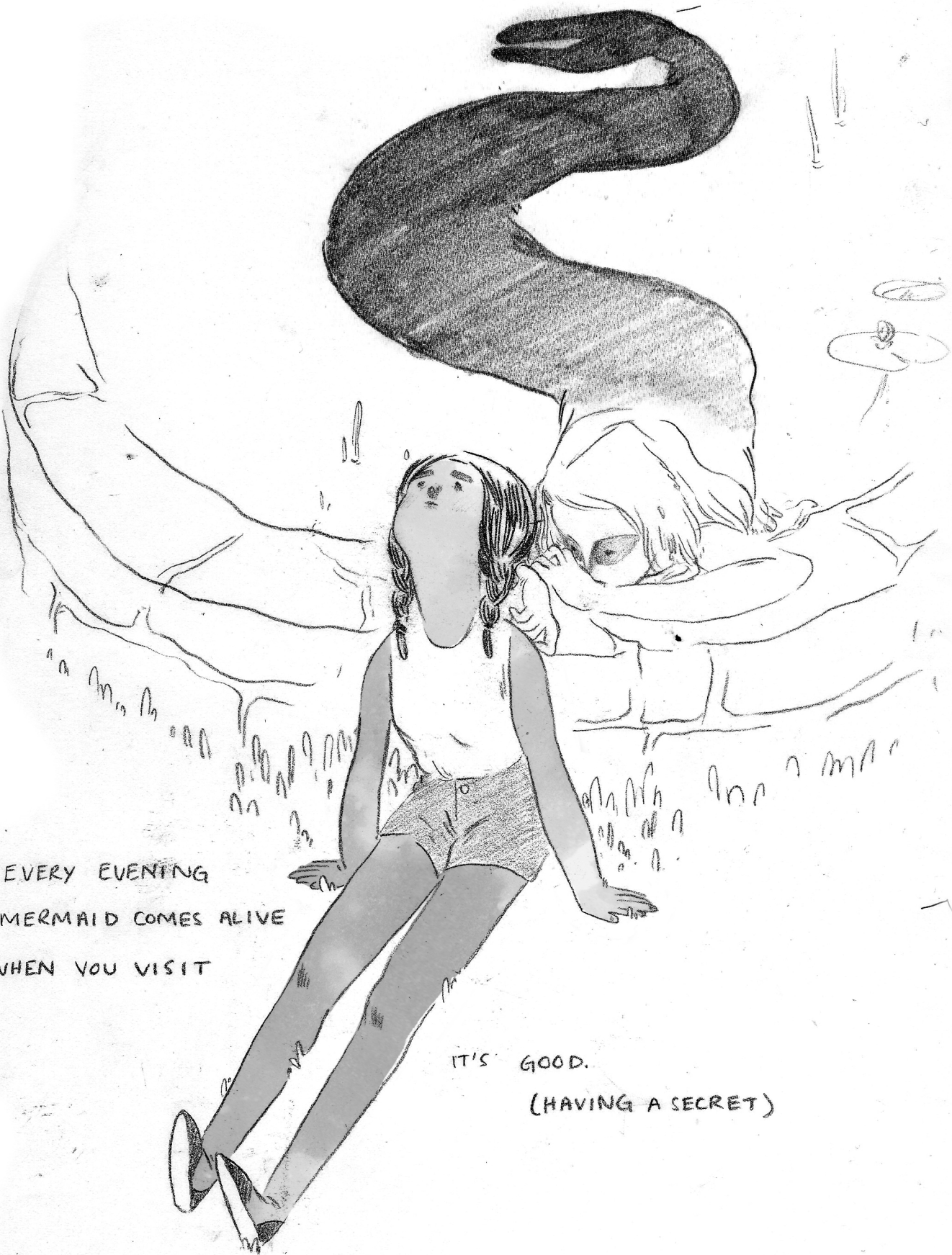
THE MERMAID
SWIMS IN THE
LITTLE FOUNTAIN
LIKE A SNAKE
IN THE GRASS



NOT AT ALL LIKE
A FISH

AND BY SOME MAGIC OR CIRCUMSTANCE
NO ONE ELSE EVER STUMBLES ON THE FOUNTAIN
WHEN SHE'S AWAKE





EVERY EVENING
THE MERMAID COMES ALIVE
WHEN YOU VISIT

IT'S GOOD.
(HAVING A SECRET)

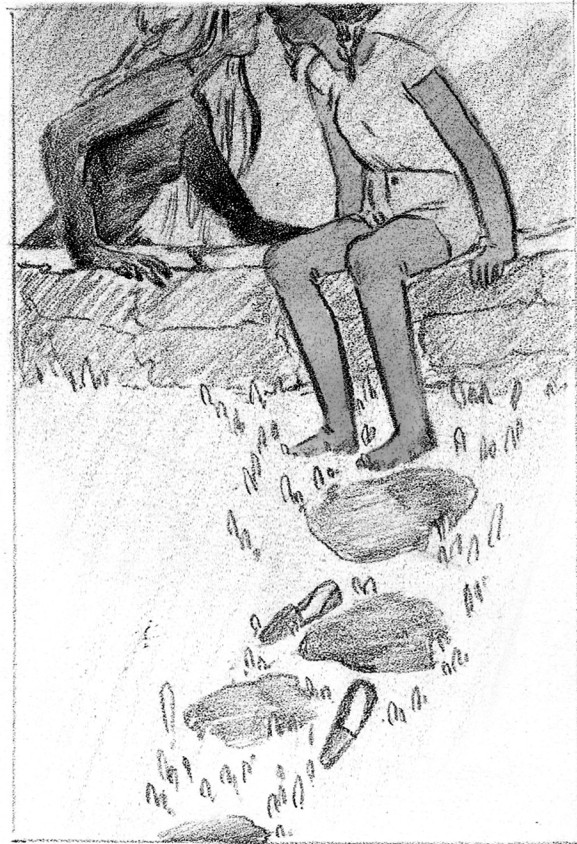


there's a curse...

SHE WHISPERS TO YOU ONE NIGHT



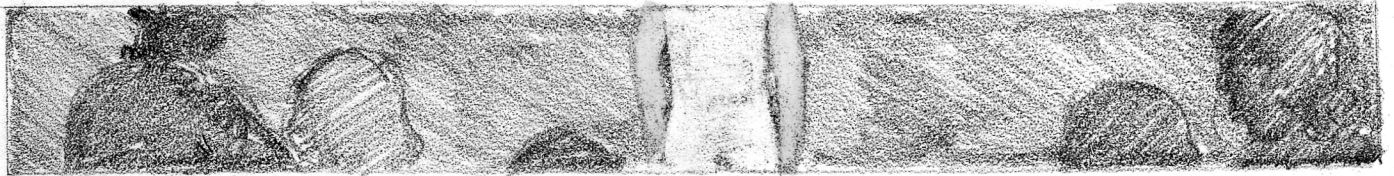
"I CAN
BREAK IT!"



"A LITTLE KISS," SHE TELLS YOU



THE NEXT DAY WHEN YOU LOOK - SHE'S GONE FROM THE FOUNTAIN



"VANDALS" YOUR NEIGHBORS MUTTER.

BUT HERE IS ANOTHER SECRET



YOU WANTED TO KISS HER
LONG BEFORE SHE ASKED YOU TO BREAK THE CURSE

Til Human Voices Wake Us

by Jennifer Hudak

I was born with a secret. When I was a girl, I hardly noticed it—just one more mild irritation, one more bit of friction. Gran taught me how an oyster builds a pearl, turning a grain of sand into something hard and slick and heavy. As if she knew about my secret, which I imagined nestled in the darkest depths of my body, glowing and iridescent. As if she knew how the secret grew, layer by shiny layer, the longer I kept it. The way she spoke made me wonder if she was born with a secret as well.

Every summer my mother shipped me off to Gran’s house on the coast of Maine. In the morning, we’d walk to the beach, and in the evening, we sat on her porch, drinking sour lemonade and knitting.

“Why does mom never come here?” I asked her once, while I struggled with my needles and yarn. My mother had grown up in this very house. She’d walked to school in sight of the coastline and gone to bed each night with salt on her skin. I took a deep breath of briny air, and couldn’t imagine why she ever left.

Gran covered my hands with her own and guided me through the motions: needle in, yarn over, pull through. “She gave up on the ocean. It was her choice.” She took her hands away and watched me work the next stitch, and the next. A scarf grew from my needles the same way the secret built itself: row by row, layer by layer.

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Beach roses busy with bees lined the footpath to the water. As soon as pavement turned to sand I took off my shoes and let the beach pumice the soles of my feet. Near the water, the sand turned colder and firmer. I tumbled into the waves, emerging with seaweed draped like a shawl over my arms. The water stung, so icy and salty, as if it were trying to work its way inside my skin.

Gran told me not to go out farther than waist-deep, even though I was a strong swimmer. She told me that the riptides could yank my legs out from under me when I was least expecting it. If I stood still, I could feel the tide suck the sand away from beneath my feet.

Gran usually stayed out of the water, but every once in a while, during the hottest part of the summer, she'd join me, wading in only up to her knees. When she trudged back on to the sand, her legs would be red and lumpy with angry hives.

"I love the ocean, but it doesn't love me," she said. The tide hissed and frothed around her ankles.

I dipped my hand into the water and splashed some on my arms, where it ran in cool rivulets and nestled into the crooks of my elbows. The ocean seemed to love me just fine. I licked my lips and tasted salt, briny and bracing.

I was wearing my favorite bathing suit, the one decorated with a smiling mermaid. The water beaded on her sequined tail, and it sparkled in the

sunlight. Gran glanced at it with an expression I couldn't parse.

"Did you know that the first sailors who said they saw mermaids were actually looking at manatees?"

"Manatees?" I'd seen pictures of them in some of the books Gran gave me. Pale and large, rounded and wrinkled, with friendly bulbous snouts. I looked down at the mermaid on my suit, with her flowing hair and long eyelashes, and frowned. "That doesn't make any sense."

"Why not? Any mermaid who swims in *this* ocean is going to have a layer of blubber instead of a little bikini top." She bent down and flicked some icy water onto my sun-warm skin, making me shriek and giggle. "Don't you think?"



At Gran's house, the rhythm of our days was like the rhythm of the tide. Each night we cooked and ate dinner at her half-circle kitchen table, washed and dried the dishes, and then carried our lemonade onto the porch with our knitting. My fingers were still clumsy on the needles, and I huffed in frustration at another dropped stitch.

"Undo it," Gran said. She'd taught me how to work the stitches in reverse until I could pick up the dropped stitch, and start the row again.

"It takes forever. When will I stop making mistakes?"

“Never.”

She must have seen the incredulous look on my face, because she set down her needles and picked up a blanket that was draped over the rattan love seat, spreading it over my lap so that I could see, right in the middle, a single twisted stitch. A tiny mistake, but it stood out in the otherwise smooth expanse of the blanket.

I ran my finger over the stitch. “Why didn’t you fix it?”

“By the time I realized I’d done it, I’d put in too much work to unravel it all.” She folded the blanket back up. “Some mistakes you just choose to live with.”

We knit until the sky turned from blue to lavender to shocking orange-pink. When the colors faded to dark and the stars appeared, Gran set down her knitting. “The sun is asleep,” she said, “and that means it’s time for us to sleep, too.”

She made me shower before bed, but still I woke in the morning with salt crusted beneath my fingernails, and sand between my toes.

}-€

When I got a little older, Gran took me for walks along the cliffs that jutted out into the ocean. I liked to scamper over the jagged rocks, waiting for the pounding surf to send up a rainbow-edged spray.

“That’s far enough,” Gran called.

“Don’t worry,” I told her. “The ocean will catch me if I fall.” I knew this with a certainty I hadn’t yet begun to question.

“You’ll sink straight to the bottom,” Gran said, and I knew this, too. Still, I was cranky when I rejoined her on the safety of the groomed path that led back to her house.

“Why do you even live here if you’re so scared of the ocean? Why didn’t you just leave like Mom did?”

Gran stared out at the sea. “We all make choices.”

I stalked off ahead of her on the path. The sound of the waves crashing against the rocks followed me, a persistent whisper.

}-€

Summer by summer, I grew. My body, which had once been beanpole thin, had softened and rounded. My mother, frowning, told me I had my Gran’s waist. But Gran didn’t care about the size of my waist, or how I looked in my bathing suit. “Who are you trying to impress, anyway?” she asked, and it was a relief not to worry about it. I let myself get plump with Gran’s cooking, and felt at ease, as though a truce had been called on a war I’d been fighting against myself without realizing it.

Gran had stopped warning me about riptides. Instead she stood on the beach while I swam. Now my legs were strong as flippers, and my hands stroked the water like a lover's skin. I felt the pull of the tide, and I imagined giving in. I imagined losing sight of land, of surrounding myself with blue. The ocean sang in words I'd begun to decipher, a tune taking shape. A melody building itself like a pearl, like a blanket, like the clack of knitting needles and the taste of sour lemonade. Like the waist I shared with Gran, and the twisted mixture of sorrow and longing on her face as she waited on the shore.

I stood where I was, a pillar in the middle of a roiling tide. The ocean tried to pull me out to sea one moment, and the next it pushed me roughly away, back toward the shore. "Choose," it whispered. It called out to me, to my secret, but I knew that the secret wasn't mine. It never had been.

I walked back to shore, where Gran waited for me on the hot, soft sand. "I know," I told her. "What we are."

"What *you* are," she said. "It's too late for me. I made my choice. The ocean doesn't want me anymore." But her eyes kept returning to the waves.

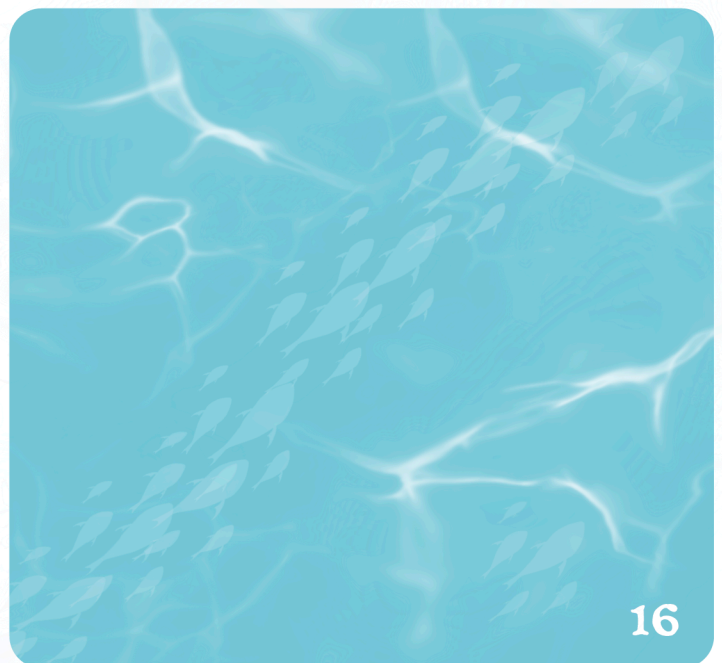
"I know what you gave up for my mom, and what she gave up for me. Now, I'm giving it back to you. That's *my* choice."

The moment I spoke the words, I felt lighter, airy and free. I felt like a seagull hanging in the sky. Gran's eyes widened.

Then her feet sank deeper into the sand. When she picked up one foot, the ocean seeped into the print. Already she looked heavier, more solid.

The ocean lapped at her toes, tasting her, remembering her flavor. When the tide rolled over her ankles, she bent down and cupped the icy water with her hands, splashing it over her arms and shoulders. Gran spoke herself to the ocean, and the ocean spoke itself to Gran, and she began to take shape.

Her legs grew tough and lean and her torso fattened and furred. She turned to look at me one last time before the sand fell away from her feet, before she dove into a wave and let the secret swallow her, let it carry her home.



Lament of the Love Struck Irish Fisherman

by Grainne Quinlan

Merrow, lady of sea and of land
I sit and watch you in secret
and as seawater splashes upon the West of Ireland rocks
I lick the splashes from my arms dizzy with your taste.

A lonely mackerel flaps on the shore
Gasping for life like I gasp for you

Merrow, they tell me stay away
Warn me you will swallow my light,
cover me in strings of sea weed-
blacker than darkness. Yet I long to
pirate your soul.

You torment me, Merrow. Why come to me each day?
Show me your face.
There is space for us.

A place only waves know. that lashes forward in foam - green
blue grey gone.

Merrow, sing to me and only me.
I will wait for you by The Flaggy Shore and watch you come in, my
hand outstretched for your webbed one hoping you might choose
me. My promises mapped in the sand.

And as clouds fall upon us, you might accept my hand, where
we will dissolve into the damp Easter air, to kneel with
love where legs mean nothing and the sea will whisper our
story to the soil and the rocks and the gulls for generations
to come.



Interview with Brigit Truex, David Bowles, and Grainne Quinlan



Editor Julia Rios sits down with three of our March authors to discuss the origins of their aquatic adventures.



This month's issue involves water legends from several different cultures. I asked three of our contributors to tell me a little more about their aquatic connections. - Julia Rios

JR

Julia Rios: Can you give us a brief description of the legend your piece drew inspiration from? What do you remember of when you first heard about it, and how common is it for people in your culture to know about it?

DB

David Bowles: Mine came from two sources. The first is a pretty common injunction among older Latinx Catholics: if you take a bath on certain days during Holy Week, you will become a fish. When I was very little, before my Mexican American family converted from Catholicism to Evangelical Christianity, I heard this every year. The other element is less known: the pre-Columbian sacred story—the most popular version preserved by the Mexica or Aztecs—that tells us when the world was destroyed for a fourth time (before the age we live in), it was through a massive flood. The Lord of Creation, Quetzalcoatl, managed to save some of the humans of that time by turning them into merfolk: tlacamichin, in Nahuatl.

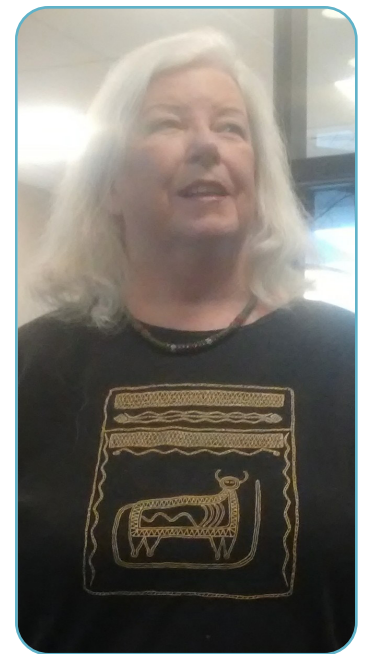
BT

Brigit Truex: Underwater Panther (“Gita-skog” in Abenaki, Great Snake) has many names, such as Water Snake, Great Lynx, and Underneath Panther, among others. Depictions have been found in wide areas of “Turtle Island” (as we often refer to North America), from Canada to Mississippi and Georgia, from Ohio to Michigan. Indeed, one multi-colored pictograph was sighted and described by the explorer Jacques Marquette in 1673 along the bluffs of the Mississippi River. Other times it has been featured in such items as copper plate and feathered headdress found in Georgia, and a ceramic bowl in current Moundville, Alabama; it is part of the Canadian Museum of History’s coat of arms; it appears to be represented in Ohio’s Alligator Effigy Mound.

BT

Brigit Truex cont.: Most often, it features an elongated, cat-like body with upright scales down its back, a snake-like tail, and clawed limbs. Its broad head is usually horned and exhibits ferocious rows of teeth. In the Great Lakes region of the Anishinaabe, it is said to guard the copper deposits there. Among my people, the Abenaki, it resides and guards Lake Champlain, often causing storms and churning water. Thus, when traveling on the lake, one offers tobacco in appeasement for a safe journey. A more contemporary quilled version, made by Abenaki artist Jim Taylor, is in the American Museum of Natural History in New York.

I heard of the Underwater Panther many years ago, when I first learned more about my Native heritage and I was intrigued by the stories. When I lived in California, a friend had a shirt made for me that featured the Panther's image, taken from an ancient bag that was decorated with porcupine quills. What also fascinates me is the fact that so many tribes and Nations are familiar with this animal. It teases the imagination as to where the stories come from in the earliest times - was there indeed a survivor of prehistoric eras, that lurks in deep waters like the "Loch Ness Monster" or more recently, the amazingly ancient coelcanth? The universality of certain creatures and events (such as what David referred to with the Great Flood; another very common element in many Native American stories) tells quite a story, I think, that should not be readily dismissed.



Brigit Truex in her Underwater Panther shirt.

GQ

Grainne Quinlan: I live by the Atlantic Ocean in the west coast of Ireland. This setting inspired the poem I wrote for *Mermaids Monthly* called 'Lament of the Love Struck Irish Fisherman'.

There is a local legend that long ago on the beach at the Flaggy Shore in County Clare, there once was a beautiful sea Merrow named Mura. She swam in the sea every morning at dawn wearing a red cap on her head. A local fisherman who lived alone in a small cottage by the shore saw her every day at dawn when he went out on his boat. He fell madly in love

GQ

Grainne Quinlan cont.: with her but was warned off by the locals who said it would come to no good as mermaids will always return to the oceans and break a mortal's heart.

Mura was falling in love with the fisherman, too. The fisherman went to look for advice. A wise old woman told the fisherman that if he stole her cap, he could marry her and she would forget all about her sea roots. So he took her cap and hid it in his fishing boat.

The pair married and had two children. They were blissfully happy for seven years. One stormy day one of the children was playing on the fishing boat and found Mura's red cap. He gave the cap to his mother and she put it on and was instantly drawn back to the sea.

She swam away and was never seen again.



Grainne Quinlan along the coast where the Merrow swims.

The fisherman and his children were heartbroken.

JR

Julia Rios: Your stories touch on protection, transformation, fear, and wonder. Do you feel these themes reflect your personal and/or cultural relationship to water? Are there other water-based legends you feel drawn to?

BT

Brigit Truex: The Woman Who Fell from the Sky immediately comes to my mind in relation to other "water" stories. This again is a tale that is familiar to the Northeastern and Great Lakes Woodlands peoples. While there are some variations in the details, basically there was a young pregnant woman in the Above World who fell through a hole in the sky. Her descent was softened by geese who lowered her onto Turtle's back, as he floated on the endless waters below. After she landed safely, the nearby animals thought she needed more room. Different ones volunteered to dive deep, in order to widen the space on Turtle's back. Eventually, the most daring

BT

Brigit Truex cont.: was Muskrat, who held his breath long enough to reach the muddy bottom. He brought up enough soil in his claws to spread on the shell - thus forming the Earth. After some time, the Woman gave birth to twins, but not before the impatient twin decided he couldn't wait for the natural process to take place and he cut himself out of his mother. He is known as the Evil Twin, as opposed to his kinder, more thoughtful Good Twin. They are responsible for the evils and the benefits on Earth and in the Two-leggeds, the Humans. After the Woman died and was buried, life-sustaining corn grew from her body.

Once again, as mentioned in the first section of these questions, we see an image that is frequently found in far-distant cultures, the Twins.

I have reimagined them in another poem which appeared in another journal (*Eye to the Telescope*), detailing the misadventures of the Evil Twin and his interactions with a familiar aquatic animal, the Beaver. Specifically, the element of water means much to me as a poet - in fact, I have a manuscript seeking a publisher (*The History of Water*) which is focused on the many aspects of water. Additionally, many paintings I have recently done include water in them.

I realize I have been almost obsessed with water and stone for nearly my whole life. It seems to take the center of so much of my art and writing, without my realizing it! Culturally speaking, I think we regard water as an element that is to be respected as both life-giver and life-taker. We cannot survive without it, yet it also may hide and disguise creatures who would harm or kill us as well. It is not our "natural element" for LIVING in, yet it provides FOR our life.

Grainne Quinlan: These are wonderful stories guys, thanks.

GQ

I live near a place called Coole Park in Gort in the west of Ireland. There is a famous poet called WB Yeats who used to visit here, and he wrote a poem called 'The Wild Swans at Coole'. It is a story I was told as a child and used to scare the living bayajus out of me.

Long ago, a man named Lir had four children named Aodh, Fionnuala, Fiachra and Conn (twins). His wife died tragically giving birth to the twins, and Lir remarried a wicked woman called Aoife.

GQ

Grainne Quinlan cont.: Aoife was jealous of the love her husband had for his children, so legend says she cast a spell on them and turned them into swans.

It is believed the children were trapped in the swans' bodies and climbed the air over Coole, their white feathers so bright. For three hundred years the children flew over the lake, trapped in their swan bodies.

The version of the story I was told was that the children still had human voices and if you sat by the water in Coole you could hear them sing and cry and chat. Some say you can still hear them...

I often go to Coole, and often a pair of swans will be gliding on the lake. I always think of this story and of WB Yeats' poem.

Water, magic, spells, legends, love, jealousy, fear, hope, poetry. It's all there.

DB

David Bowles: Definitely the stories from my community about the dangers of water (like the injunction against bathing or the deluge myth) have influenced me. Bodies of water are seen as passageways for spirits (and as ways to enter the spiritual realm / underworld). As a kid, I was haunted by the story of La Llorona, which itself is an ancient tale about a being the Aztecs called the Zohuaehecatl (Wind Woman)—betrayed by her husband, she drowns her children and then herself. Now she wanders the waterways of the world, looking for her little ones and mistaking local children for her own. She then pulls them into the water with her, killing them.



David Bowles with his brother Fernando, finding peace with the water in 1989.

My Grandmother Garza used to tell me this tale to keep me from our local canals and oxbow lakes. I frankly didn't even want to bathe after hearing it: I learned to prefer showers at an early age. The problem got so acute that I didn't learn to swim until my father finally threw me into the middle of a circular pool, the kind that are shallower at the edge. That experience deepened my trauma about water, though I would go on to make my peace with it when I lived on South Padre Island, between the Bahia Madre Bay and the Gulf of Mexico.

The Wild Swans at Coole

Originally published in 1917 by The Cuala Press by W. B. Yeats

The trees are in their autumn beauty,
 The woodland paths are dry,
 Under the October twilight the water
 Mirrors a still sky;
 Upon the brimming water among the stones
 Are nine and fifty swans.

The nineteenth Autumn has come upon me
 Since I first made my count;
 I saw, before I had well finished,
 All suddenly mount
 And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
 Upon their clamorous wings.

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,
 And now my heart is sore.
 All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
 The first time on this shore,
 The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
 Trod with a lighter tread.

Unwearied still, lover by lover,
 They paddle in the cold,
 Companionable streams or climb the air;
 Their hearts have not grown old;
 Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
 Attend upon them still.

But now they drift on the still water
 Mysterious, beautiful;
 Among what rushes will they build,
 By what lake's edge or pool
 Delight men's eyes, when I awake some day
 To find they have flown away?

Cold Water

by Karen Porter Sorensen

“Deeper Karen ... keep coming deeper,”
Ellie calls.

My legs sting as I edge into the water.
My swimsuit clings to me. A slow burn
creeps up my body spreading numbness
from my groin to my belly.

“Keep coming! You’ve got to get up to
your shoulders ... once your shoulders are
under you won’t feel the cold anymore,”
Kathleen encourages me.

“You won’t feel anything,” laughs the
German woman whose name I can’t
remember.

“Come on in, the water feels glorious,”
Ellie chirps.

I grit my teeth. The water is freezing.

}-€

On Ireland’s legendary Flaggy Shore
where Lady Gregory spent her summer
holidays and Seamus Heaney wrote his
famous poem, ‘Postscript’, I have started
a weekly ritual of swimming with the
New Quay Mermaids, a group of 80 or
so locals, many over the age of 70, who

25

gather daily to swim with the tides.

They swim, twice a day, year round,
whatever the weather — they’ve
been spotted during storms and seen
swimming in January’s freezing waters.

Hardly surprisingly, they have a
reputation in the community for being
eccentric.

Ellie, the founder of the group, has the
enthusiasm and magnetism of a cult
leader—she has talked countless people
into the madness of cold water swimming,
and somehow, despite my better
judgement, last summer I became one of
them.

Madness you say — Why would you do it?
I asked the mermaids the same question
until I tried. It’s something you just have
to experience for yourself.

}-€

The sea is painfully cold. My mind blanks
striding into the water. I can’t think of
anything: all the worries about my future
career, the taxes we haven’t done, the
laundry, the dishes, the flashing engine

light in my car, and the children who aren't eating right all evaporate. Only the physical sensations I'm experiencing are there. My body screams stop, my skin stings, but I summon all my self-control to walk forward. I am up to my waist, my breasts, my arms go under, then my shoulders. I have to keep moving to stay warm, so I swim breaststroke, wildly kicking back and forth. Then something switches in my brain and everything slows down and I feel this RUSH flooding me and I'm high as a kite, gloriously happy, and stunningly alive.

I have researched the phenomenon of cold water swimming and discovered that what I'm actually feeling is endorphins flooding my body. It's my central nervous system's natural response to pain.

The feeling of euphoria is very similar to the effects produced by morphine, and the two primary causes for endorphin release — apparently — are pain and orgasm. So, in other words, cold water swimming makes you feel really good — it's no wonder the mermaids and I are addicted.

I plunge my head under the sea again and it seems to break the spell I have been under. It's a crystal clear world below. Crabs scuttle along the sea bottom just inches from my toes. Undulating purple jellyfish float harmlessly by. Suddenly I'm revived and passionately breathing air deep into my lungs as I swim in a frenzy to keep warm.

Then Ellie calls the mermaids and mermen to her. We draw close, forming a

ring and holding hands. I take the warm hands of two women on either side of me and Ellie says:

“Oh Lord, watch over everyone in this circle. Continuous harmony to all our mermaids and mermen and their families. Keep us all strong physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and FINANCIALLY!”

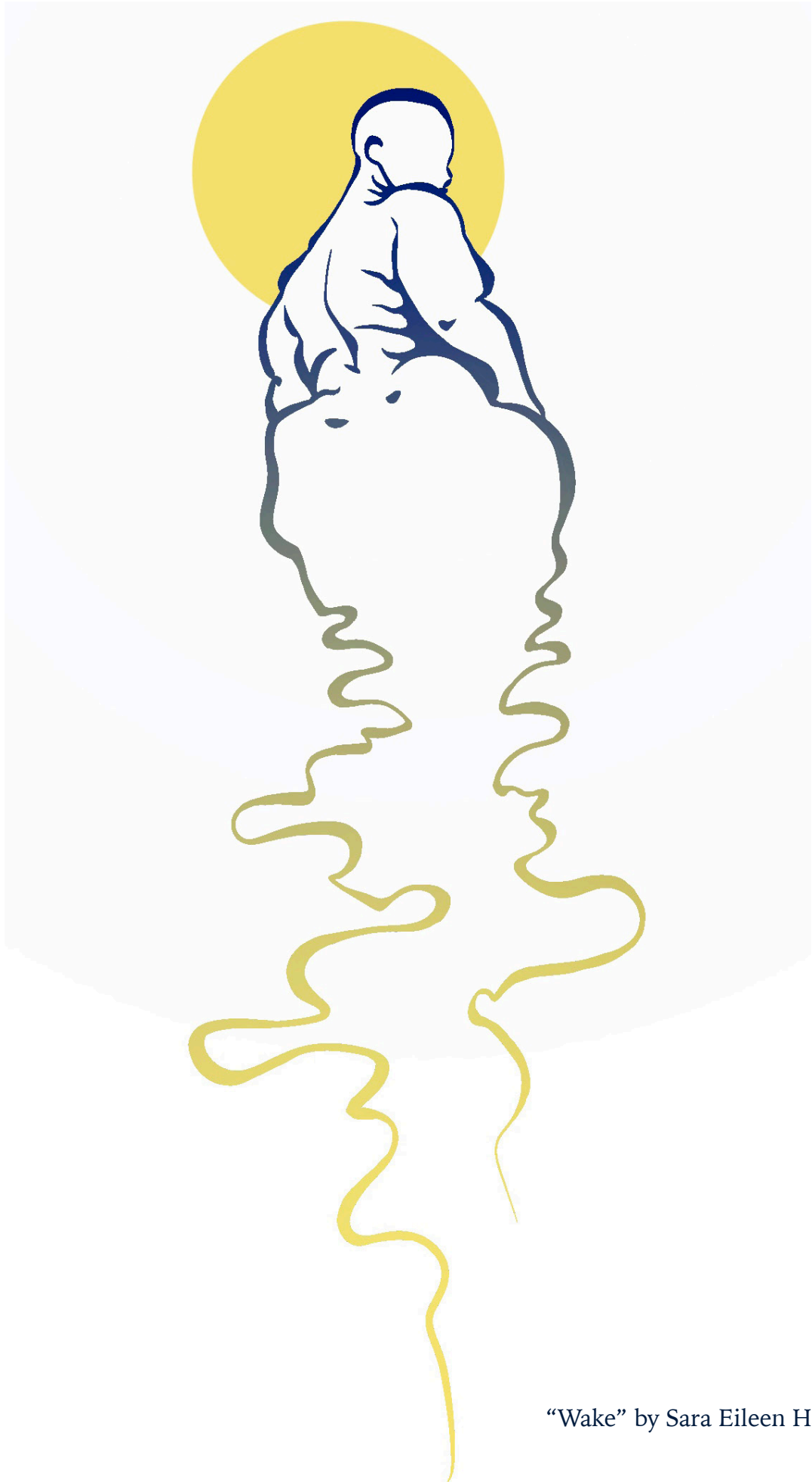
Everyone lifts their arms in the air in unison and laughs uproariously before we separate.

At the end of it all I rise out of the sea, new born. The warm touch of the sunshine on my cold skin is so pleasing. I drive home, shaking with cold, rush through the door, and climb into a hot shower, letting it pulse on the hottest setting to thaw me out.

Even under this extreme heat I don't feel warm, but I am aware of every inch of my skin. My body has come back to life.

My husband and boys are snuggling under the covers watching cartoons on his phone. I climb back into bed, blissfully hugging the children's small bodies, trying to warm up with their body heat.

Later I go downstairs, flip pancakes, and pour hot tea, my body still trembling from this new ritual that has at last encompassed me in a profound and simple happiness that has somehow eluded me for the rest of the week.



Underwater Panther

by Brigit Truex

I am lying on this rock-lip, above
 ink-shaded water, determined to see
 for myself as just below

it lunges, horned cat-head grins no grin
 ferocious teeth snatching at my face
 its long-pulled body ripples, twitching

mix of sinuous feline and murky snake
 unnatural, warned of, hissing
 fanged claws rake stones, maul the air

wet moss drooling its jaws, its barbed length, tail
 snapping, thrashes itself into the deep darkness
 just beyond my reach, its reach. Turbulent

quiet, rock-spurned wake seethes, settles.
 I stumble back, heart, a fist against my chest.
 My throat, a drum. Had I tumbled in,

Who would know? Search? Fear for me?
 Far from the lake, I stop running at last.
 Aspen-leaf quiver in my legs, done.

My breath catches up to me. I stretch out my hands,
 slightest tremble still, see the doubled image of
 leaf drifting to water, paired, mirrored.

I puzzle what remains seen and unknown. Could some hand
 lured the panther-spirit to lair there, below the surface,
 given it endless life, pecked stone to stone

below the hanging ledge, to leap and snarl at the unwary –
 protect those waters with its flaring eyes, storied
 tooth and claw? The how is mine, the why,

the answer, a cloud in my hand.

Siren Call

by David Bowles

As Soledad Ramírez slid behind the wheel of the two-year-old '63 Ford pickup, she noticed through the cracked windshield that the concave summit of the Cerro de la Silla was shrouded in heavy gray clouds. Her heart skipped a beat as it always did at the thought of rain, and she pushed the groaning door open, dashing back into the ranch house she had called home for nearly thirty years. Inside, her two daughters, anxious to catch the resolution of Thursday's cliff-hanger episode of the popular soap opera *La mentira*, were arguing in front of the console TV she'd bought them six years ago for Christmas, its black and white images leaping to clarity and then dissolving into static as the teens maneuvered the rabbit ears.

"I forgot to remind you," she said breathlessly as they stopped fumbling with the antenna, "not to take a bath today. It's Good Friday."

Isabel, whose wedding was only six months away, sighed dramatically. "My God, mother, you told us the same thing yesterday. We understand, already: you've been repeating that old wives' tale to us since we were little!"

Soledad knew that her daughter was about to become a wife and needed to

be independent of her mother, but her supercilious tone was still irking. "You know how important this is, girls: you *cannot* immerse yourselves in water on Thursday or Friday of Holy Week. Don't make light of it, and don't get snooty with me when I just have your best interests at heart!"

Renata, the younger of the sisters, grumbled sullenly. "But the town dance is tonight! You mean I have to go without taking a bath? I haven't been able to all week, and I need to!"

"You don't 'have' to go to the dance at all. Young Alberto could live without seeing you today. But, to answer your question, you'll just have to wash with a damp rag. No baths; do you understand?"

"But, Mom!"

Soledad wanted to scream in frustration. "Why is it so hard for you to listen to and obey me? Do you *want* to turn into a fish? Be condemned to spend the rest of your life in the ocean, far from your family? I don't understand you, Renata. How many times have I told you about Valledupar and the spoiled little girl who disobeyed her parents?"

Renata rolled her eyes. “Tons. She went swimming on Good Thursday and turned into a mermaid. There’s a statue of her. Etcetera, etcetera. I’m not a kid anymore, Mom! I’m fifteen!”

“Your age has nothing to do with it! What, you don’t believe me? You think I made that story up for you? I lived there! I heard the singing when she tried to make me jump into the waters of the Pozo de Hurtado!”

“Mom,” Isabel murmured condescendingly, “you were just a little girl. Maybe you imagined that song, or maybe you heard something else and your brain made it sound like a mermaid singing.”

Soledad’s jaw was clenched with barely bridled anger. Closing her eyes to better focus on the words, she nearly growled at Isabel. “Listen. If you don’t want to believe me, fine. Just make sure your sister doesn’t get near that tub. I’ve got to take groceries to your grandma: I can’t hover over you as if you were little children. Can I trust you to do as I’ve asked?”

Isabel’s eyes widened as she understood how serious the matter was for her mother. “Sure, Mom. Of course. Don’t worry. Give grandma a kiss for us.”

With Renata murmuring in childish discontent at her back, Soledad returned to the truck and began heading toward Monterrey. As the ranch and then the town of Guadalupe shrank behind her, raindrops began to splatter the

windshield, leaving behind viscid streaks that latticed the spidering cracks in an ominous moiré. Tightening her hands around the steering wheel, Soledad recoiled from the splashes as if God himself were flinging acid in her direction. She hated water, truly and viscerally despised it. Ever since she had nearly leapt into the waters of the Guatapurí on a Good Friday thirty-two years ago – heedless of her parents’ repeated telling of the story of the Mermaid of Hurtado, entranced by an alien melody—she had grown increasingly wary of the seemingly innocent liquid. It was cruel, water was: it destroyed lives, eroded families into bereft little isles, inundated hearts with despair.

She had first learned of water’s true nature not long after her arrival in Mexico. Her father, who had worked all his life in the Colombian cattle industry, had inherited a ranch in Guadalupe, a small town in the Mexican state of Nuevo León. The transition had been hard for Soledad, even harder than the ocean voyage to her new country. Despite looking superficially similar to Valledupar, a watery valley partially hugged by mountains, Guadalupe was difficult to get accustomed to. Children at school teased her because of her accent and peculiar vocabulary; it took her years to submerge the vallenata Soledad Ramírez in the depths of the new guadalupana version of herself. However, this identity crisis was a trifle next to the loss of her father the day after her tenth birthday. He’d been driving back from Texas, where he has purchased several hundred head of cattle, when a

gusty storm had blown up out of nowhere. Visibility had dropped to zero in seconds, and Martín Ramírez had ploughed into an oncoming truck, killing himself nearly instantly.

After two years of mourning, Soledad's mother had married a widower doctor with two young sons. The five of them had lived a relatively joyful life until Soledad's stepfather was also claimed by water: his colleagues in the medical profession had assured them that the bacteria that killed Dr. Joaquín Bétancourt were probably ingested with a glass of water that simply hadn't been correctly treated, but Soledad knew the truth. The water was torturing her, slowly destroying all she came to love.

Only two years later, Soledad had met a ranch hand named Roberto and fallen in love against the wishes of her snobbish mother. When her daughter had insisted on marrying the boy, both of them barely sixteen, Ana Ramírez had made her stepsons the only heirs of the ranch. She hadn't cut Soledad off completely, however: the new couple had stayed in the guest house, slowly assuming the managerial duties that Ana began to neglect. Finally, upon moving to Monterrey to be free from the rural drudge she'd withstood for so many years, a weary Ana had allowed Soledad and Roberto to remain behind and run things as best they could. And they had worked wonders, bringing the operation to a level of financial success it hadn't

seen in years. A daughter had been born, then another: Soledad had felt free of the tragedies of her past, and a series of dry, nearly drought-like years had withered her phobia into dusty passivity.

But then the heavy rains had come, and Roberto had been pulled into the muddy currents of the overflowing river he was trying to save his cattle from. Water had once more defeated Soledad, and she swore it never would again: she would be on her guard.

She was not a cowardly woman; in fact, she knew that—like most women—she was stronger than a man could ever be, in the ways that counted. She continued to run the ranch after her husband's death, and the profit she wrung from the family business was more than enough to put her stepbrothers through college and sustain their wild bachelorhood. Both were now in their thirties, neither worked, and Soledad continued wordlessly to pay them a greater percentage of the ranch's profits.

But her daughters awakened in her an obsessive protection. She was deathly afraid of what water might do to them in its bloody-minded determination to break her will. At first, she'd been weak: it had taken little Renata's nearly slipping wet from Soledad's arms after being bathed, nearly shattering against the mercilessly hard concrete and tile floor, for Soledad to take the necessary precautions. From then on, the girls always bathed sitting in a

tub; the water was allowed to drain completely before she would slide an over-sized towel in and have them stand atop it as she dried them. They never went out when it rained. They never drank water, only juice, aguas frescas, and coca-cola, beverages in which water's natural malevolence had been macerated by other elements. She taught them never to cry, beating them severely if a single tear passed their eyelashes. She did all she could to keep them from sweating, installing one of the first central air conditioning units in Mexico, the only one on a ranch in her entire state, and providing them with every amenity they could ever require so they wouldn't desire to go out in the torturously hot summer months. The girls never learned to swim and had never even visited the beach. As much as she could, their mother had waterproofed their lives.

Soledad knew she couldn't keep them safe forever, but she would not have their perdition on her head, would not end up like the parents of Rosario Arciniegas, condemned to grieve all their lives for the daughter they'd lost to the siren call of the miserable waters of the Guatapurí River.

The visit with her mother went as it almost invariably did: poorly. Ana lit into Soledad for not coming by more often, for being oppressively despotic with Isabel and Renata, for not doing more for her brothers. Soledad pretended to listen, but she couldn't stop thinking that today was the day. Today water would win. The

feeling bubbled up from inside her, and as she sweated against her own will, the salty liquid beaded on her skin, kept from evaporating by the heavy humidity. She said her goodbyes and walked back to the truck through a curtain of moisture. The air seemed unable to contain any more water vapor, and Soledad found it difficult to breathe: every inhalation brought the malicious liquid into her lungs. In a panic, she wondered if one could drown in humid air.

Under a blackening sky, she raced back to the ranch, the certainty of her doom spreading like a puddle atop her soul. Fidencio's car was parked in front of the house: Isabel's fiancé was paying a visit, meaning that Soledad's older daughter would not be vigilant with Renata.

Shoving the door aside brutally, Soledad interrupted the kissing couple with a despairing cry. "Where is Renata, damn you?"

"Uh," began Isabel, but a muffled splash was all the answer that her mother needed. Racing down the hallway, Soledad banged open the bathroom door to find Renata weeping silently in the soapy bathwater. Protruding grotesquely from one end of the tub was the y-shaped tailfin of a fish. Soledad fell to her knees and slid toward her daughter across the wet tile. Her head spun, and she thought she might vomit. She gripped the porcelain lip of the tub and touched Renata's forehead with her own.

“Oh, baby!” she whispered.

“Mama, I’m so sorry,” sobbed Renata loudly. “Oh, God, why didn’t I listen to you? I called my friends, and they told me you were crazy, that they took baths all the time on Good Friday and nothing happened to them. And, oh, Mother of God, I believed them and now look at me!”

Isabel and Fidencio were standing horrified at the doorway. Soledad quickly got them to help her lift Renata from the tub onto a pallet of towels she’d laid out on the floor. Fidencio, nervous and embarrassed at seeing his future sister-in-law naked, nearly lost his grip on her mucilage-slick scales; Soledad cursed him roughly, and he bucked up. Soon they’d dried the teen completely, hoping that the strange, unbelievable transformation would somehow be reversed out of the water. But it was to no avail; in fact, being dry caused Renata great pain.

“Put me back!” she groaned. “Oh, it hurts so bad! Put me back into the tub, please!”

And they did. Over the course of the next week, Soledad tried everything she could think of to wrench her daughter back from the arms of the watery destiny that had claimed her. Remedies she procured from curanderas and santeros, from wizards and healers of all types, but nothing worked. Isabel and Fidencio wanted her to call the authorities, bring doctors, but Soledad refused: science would just view Renata as an aberration

and cloister her away as surely as water was attempting to. No, there had to be a better way.

Renata, in the meantime, seemed to be going stir-crazy. “It’s so boring in here,” the teen kept complaining, so Soledad bought another portable T.V. for the bathroom, as well as rock and roll albums for the phonograph they set up on the sink. But Renata’s desperation went deeper than just a lack of entertainment; she was restless and cramped and easily angered. In addition, she soon began to complain of real physical discomfort: her scales were growing some sort of fungus. Fidencio had the idea of adding salt to the bath water, which seemed to help, but another problem came up: the tub was simply too small. As each cure Soledad tried failed, it became obvious that they’d have to put Renata in a larger container.

Soledad let the ranch hands go, much to their chagrin; some of them had worked more than a decade on the ranch. After she’d sold the cattle off at a suspiciously ridiculous price, she emptied, scrubbed down, and refilled with brine the large cement watering trough that her herd had once used. Here Renata had freedom of movement and began immediately to swim back and forth, almost excited at the new abilities she discovered she had. Soledad felt impotent at the pleasure Renata experienced in the trough: while she wanted her daughter to be happy, she refused to accept a happiness that derived from water’s treachery.

The morning after Renata's move, awakening from a nightmare in which dark figures had moved in viscous silence, Soledad rushed out to check on her daughter. Not seeing the teen, she began to scream Renata's name. The metamorphosed adolescent erupted from the depths of the water, sending waves over the edge of the trough and twisting her head about wildly.

"What? What?"

"Thank God, Renata. You're okay. When I didn't see you, I..."

Renata grabbed the lip of the trough and pushed her now naked torso out into the morning air. "Mom, it's so cool! I can stay underwater as long as I want! I can *breathe the water!*"

Soledad's blood froze in her veins. Her impulse to reprimand Renata's nudity was completely forgotten as the dumb gasping of gill slits on the girl's neck twisted Soledad's innards like a harbinger of inevitability.

"And out here, especially at night when I'm down near the bottom, I can hear them much clearer."

"Hear who?" her mother asked, already knowing the answer, feeling the horror rising like bile in her gorge.

"You know, *them*. The others. They say they used to call to you, too, when you

were little. They want me to join them. The say we belong with them."

Renata's words ripped a sob from the depths of her mother's soul. *I'm going to lose her. No way to avoid it.* The weight of her impotence hunching her over, Soledad rushed to the truck and drove to the parish. She had avoided calling on the priest because, in her pride, she had been determined to solve the problem herself, without God's help, like she'd done time and again throughout her life. She respected God, feared him, but He was, after all, the creator of water. Hadn't the Earth originally been a formless ocean, according to *Genesis*? But now she needed to try. She'd confess, get the priest to come, humble herself: anything to free Renata from water's amorphous grasp.

Father Vidal Weiss could hardly credit her tale, but he accompanied Soledad to the ranch. When he saw Renata leap like a dolphin in the water, falling back in with a breathtakingly graceful twist and splash, he nearly fainted. He collapsed heavily onto a rock and sat there with his head in his hands, murmuring. Finally, he looked up at Soledad, tears in his eyes.

"My daughter, what can I say? This has to be a miracle."

"Miracle?" Soledad scoffed. "More like a curse. I told her time and again not to bathe, Father, just like my parents taught me. No bathing on Good Friday. But she wouldn't listen. No matter how hard

I tried to protect her, she just had to do what she wanted.”

After staring uncomprehendingly at the cement trough for several minutes, the priest nodded, his eyes losing their startled glaze. Father Weiss motioned Soledad over, gesturing for her to kneel down in front of him. “Listen to me, Soledad. There is no official prohibition against bathing on Good Friday. It’s simply a sign of respect that many believers have blown up into a folkloric injunction. No, I don’t think this metamorphosis was caused by disobedience,” the priest looked at her sadly, his lips parting slowly as if reluctant to cast judgment on her. “No, Soledad: it was caused by your obsession. I’ve heard your confessions for ten years now, child. I have begged you to turn this fear over to our Lord, but you’ve stubbornly clung to it. Your own hatred of water and stubborn pride has brought this tragedy about.”

Soledad said nothing as she drove the priest back to the moldy church amid his promises to contact the archbishop and even Rome in search of an answer. While she appreciated his efforts, she knew with sudden surety that he was fundamentally wrong: her daughter’s change *had* been effected by an act of disobedience. Her own. The truth was so clear now: Soledad had disobeyed the call, had ignored it and feared it, had taught her children to eschew it. Renata’s new existence was the price of that defiance.

On each of the following three days,

Soledad noticed how distant Renata grew, how she stayed under the surface for hours at a time, listening, or clinging to the rim of the trough, staring wistfully in the direction of the sea. Finally, on the afternoon of the third day, from the girl’s lips a haunting song began to burble, as if she were answering her distant cousins in their own tongue. Once the echoes of her finished lay had died like ripples on the air, Renata turned alien eyes on her mother.

“They sing of their ancient sisters, of princely men they left the glassy deep for, of daughters who have never come home. They’re calling us, Mom. Can’t you hear them?”

Soledad’s heart sundered beneath the weight of her complicity in Renata’s ruin, but she did not falter. She knew now what she had to do.

Onto one of the trailers used for hauling cattle she placed the porcelain tub and filled it with water. Then she called to her daughter, standing on the stone steps that led up one side of the trough. Plunging her arms into the water with a shudder, Soledad managed to pull her daughter from the water and, her muscles burning with every step, walk her down to the tub.

“Are we...?” began Renata, gesturing hopefully eastward as her mother slid her into the gleaming white porcelain.

“Yes, my love. Just relax. It’ll be a few hours.”

Sobbing the whole way, finally surrendering to the traitorous water that made up most of her body, letting the tears drip down onto her slowly drying clothes, Soledad drove her daughter to a beach near Tampico. The sun was already setting in a miasma of purple and pink fretted with gold, and in the distance, silhouetted against the reddish ball, mother and daughter saw shapes leaping from the waves.

Soledad had backed the trailer all the way into the shoals, and she now waded into the water to unhinge the door and help Renata out. For a brief moment, they embraced amid caressing swells, and Soledad gave her daughter a final kiss on the forehead.

“Be happy, Renata, whatever happens. I release you. Find your way as best you can.” And her daughter slipped from her arms and rocketed toward her new family in the unknowable depths.

Over the next year, Soledad’s dreams gradually filled with the shifting, clinquant light of the sun as reflected through the monochrome stained-glass of the ocean’s surface. Each night she dreamt that Renata was calling her, singing that ancient melody that had caused so much fear in Colombia decades ago. The song grew louder and louder, its meaning so tantalizingly close to being clear, until nearly a year after Renata’s departure, Soledad knew the time for surrender had come. Isabel was married,

her brothers engaged, her mother content. There was nothing holding her anymore now that her fear was gone.

The flight to Colombia took her over a long stretch of ocean along the Central American coast. As she looked out the window at that gorgeous expanse of blue-green, she marveled that she had ever hated it. She understood now that both she and the priest had been wrong. Neither hate nor disobedience had caused Renata’s transformation: it had simply been her destiny. There was nothing shameful or cruel about it at all.

Standing upon a boulder in the morning chill of Good Friday, Soledad slowly pulled her dress over her head and stripped her undergarments away. Far off, she heard her daughter calling her, a clear, beautiful song older than the river itself. The eldritch tones, flitting between notes on the human scale like gemmed fins among the waves, crystallized in meaning for her.

Come. Come home. Come to the shadowy green depths of your ancestors’ home. Come home to the coral-festooned caves, to the secret currents of warmth far from the wavering sun. Come to me, mother. Come home. Come.

Taking a final look at the Pozo of Hurtado before her, Soledad closed her eyes, lifted her arms—dry for the very last time—and leapt headfirst into her own much-delayed fate.

How to Eat a Mermaid

by K. Garcia Ley

Content note: This story contains non-consensual kissing, body horror transformation, graphic violence, and cannibalism.

From here at our fish house, where the downward curve of the mountain meets the shore of the lagoon, my little sister and I, huddled, starved, desperate, finally hear the mermaid splashing in the water and we know it's time to kill it. A warm breeze wails in from the north of La Ensenada and the ash remnants of the nuclear war settles on the moonlit water like a deceptive fog. Shakily, I peek through my worn binoculars, hoping our food is not a hallucination. It splashes again, clear and strong as it ripples across the water like broken glass. My ears perk up. *Please*. For a lingering moment, my heart pounds and my stomach growls as I zoom the lens into the lagoon, currents of hunger flooding my body, and I think I *must* have hallucinated, like when I hear

one of my dead sisters crying in the sea. But when I adjust the lens, it's there.

The mermaid materializes from the mist. Even from the shore, I spot its giant lobster claws and blue muscled chest moving with the tide, in and out of the water. I lick my lips and yell at my sister Martina - the last of us - to ready the boat.

We hadn't seen a matured mermaid in weeks. Its kind appeared after La Calamidad, the nuclear war, wiped out our lands and fishing farms, and left us starving for weeks at a time. We hadn't meant to kill the first one in a boating accident, but then the kill turned into curiosity, and curiosity turned into our only source of food.

“Are you sure,” Martina’s forehead wrinkles and she pushes her matted black ringlets away from her face.

We’ve made the mistake before, hunting one before its time, nibbling its fat-less bones. There’s nothing worse than a skinny mermaid. “It’s strong and the perfect blue. It’s ready.” I pack the boat and point with my lips towards the lagoon. I would not make the same mistake again, not when we are the last ones on the shore dying for food. I refuse to let my sister die, too.

Martina’s amber eyes squint in the dark, but then gasps in delight. “Oh, you’re right, hermana. Let’s go, let’s go. Before it leaves.” We’re thin and our muscles convulse from not having eaten in weeks, but we manage to shove the rusty boat off the pebbled shore and into the lagoon’s night.

We cut the engine a few yards from the mermaid. It turns and tilts its head towards us.

“It doesn’t even know we’re hunting it,” I chuckle under my breath as I jig the casting spoon left and right in the water, luring it to come closer. From behind me, I wave at Martina to ready the spear. My fingers shake and I force them to keep the rhythm steady; not too desperate, not too lazy.

It swims to the boat’s ledge, crosses its claws, and grins all the way to its ears revealing its long sharp teeth.

“Are you sure about this,” Martina mutters, her voice fragile, and for a moment, I wonder if I hear nervousness or if it’s simply the lack of food forcing her to quiver.

“Coño,” I hiss at her. “Just concentrate and remember what I taught you. Don’t mess up like last time.” My voice is raspy and harsher than I intend on my baby sister. I want to pull her into a soft embrace, to calm her nerves, to pour into her the confidence that we will eat today because of *her*, and that I, the oldest, believe in her and us and the mermaid. But I hope my glare is enough to drive the importance of eating. I point curtly to my abdomen. “Pierce the left gill, pull to the boat’s right.” We’ve been out of practice and our experienced sisters like Juana who loved to spear the mermaids, are now dead. Our lives now depend on Martina. I’m good at luring but she’ll have to spear.

Water bubbles through the mermaid’s gills. Its onyx-colored eyes bulge out of its head, and its fins stretch into the water. My heart quickens but I force my shoulders to relax. Soon we will feast.

“Hola sirena,” I croon and reach my hand out. “Como estás, sirena?”

It gurgles, like a purr, and rubs its blue head in my palm. For a moment, I admire the shades of blue and purple reflecting off its scales, the shades of silence between the slippery waters, the moonlight reflecting off its eyes.

Suddenly, it leaps up and kisses me on the lips, its mouth salty and rough. I step back and bump into Martina. I spit and wipe my lips on my sleeve disgusted that the mermaid would attempt such an intimate display of emotion.

“Isa, your lips. They’re bleeding.” My sister backs away from me, her eyes wide and alert. “Your hands –“

Scales explode from my skin and my hands twist into claws. My legs thicken and contort into four large fins that slap and flap against the boat’s floor and long pink antennas rip holes through my cheeks. My clothes and long-matted hair lay in shreds around me like knotted ropes, and gills stretch and tremble across my abdomen, opening up like blossoms. I try to vomit over the boat’s side but fail to expel an already empty stomach. I breathe, but the air is thick like honey forced down my throat. The mermaid shrieks.

“What did you do,” I scream but my voice comes out like muddy babbles instead.

Instinct kicks in and I know I need water. I jump out and the rough taste of the lagoon’s water rushes into my gills and I can finally breathe. I flex and bend my new fins away from the shadowy depth, towards the surface and my boat.

I try to climb onto the boat’s side, but it sways, and I slide back into the water. *Please Martina*, hermana, por favor. I crawl back onto the ledge and muster all my strength to get her attention. If she could

just look at me – the sister who raised her, protected her during the war, sang her to sleep so she wouldn’t think of food, loved her when the broken parts between us bled into one.

In an instant, she snatches the spear, and then I know: she can’t see *me*.

I don’t want to leave her, but I know the look of hunger. My muscles ache, weakness overtaking my new body, but I force myself to swim away. I pivot and frantically search for the mermaid. Could I follow it? It had to have found a haven, from us – from them - somewhere in the lagoon. The mermaid swims a loop nearby and I wave a claw to it. *Help me*. It shakes its head and swims away from the lagoon’s curves against the mountain, and into the sea.

The gut-wrenching truth of my reality sinks in. No longer human, tears don’t drip out of my eyes and since I have no eyelids, blinking them away is useless anyway. I bob in the water, waves of panic dulling my mind.

The spear comes quick through my left gill. I should be desperate to escape, mad at her even. My intuition tells me to crush her with my claw, to fight, to survive, to run away – to bite. But as my little sister hauls a net over my body and as she stumbles clumsily to retrieve me, pulling, reeling, tugging, breathing heavily against me, I can’t help but be proud of how well I taught her how to catch her food. How to kill it. And now, how to eat a mermaid.



At least one of us will survive.

She laughs hysterically and claps as the velvet fog lifts slightly from the water. She hums to herself a familiar lullaby from when we were kids. I don't fight the hunger or the battle or the sister. The human in front of me is hazy as a curtain of blood eases out of me, but I see her raise a dull blade and say, "Just a small piece."

If she hurries, she could steer back to our fish house and eat in time for breakfast. I sigh a satisfied last gurgle and know that soon we will no longer be hungry.



Getting Our Sea-Legs

What We're Doing Differently, and Why

by Julia Rios

I've worked for several online magazines, and in my experience, every one of them has operated a bit differently to the others. Some publish a little bit of content for free online on a weekly basis, while selling monthly ebook subscriptions. Others publish at different rates, freely and behind paywalls.

We're deliberately not spacing out our content to have a steady stream of it. Instead, we're giving it all to our subscribers just a little earlier than we plan to give it to the general public, and once an issue is free, it's entirely free. We give everyone access to all the versions: web, ebook, and PDF.

Why? Because I think of these issues as units, and I want anyone who finds one to be able to enjoy the whole unit at once in whatever format makes them most comfortable.

Mermaids Monthly was conceived as one year-long project, and at the end of the year, my goal is for the entirety of it to be available for anyone who wants to read all of it.

We're also deeply committed to paying anyone who works with us. Regardless of whether we're talking about contributors or staff, we're adamant that people

who work with or for us should receive monetary compensation. This is not true of every place I have worked, and it's certainly not true of the literary journal world as a whole. Because of this, we have a very small staff, and we're probably going to keep it that way.

And content? When I first thought of doing this, I imagined stories and poems, but once I brought the idea up to Meg, it started to grow. What about art? Comics? Essays? Why not all of them? We are celebrating merfolk here, and the ways that creative people explore merfolk are many. We're excited to showcase several of them! I also wanted to encourage creative collaboration and play, which is why we have our Each to Each series of collaborations.

Mermaids Monthly is also a hybrid of solicited content and content we receive through open submissions. Our open calls are definitely not just tokens. We have already published works by 13 different submitters from our open submissions just in these first 3 issues, and we plan to publish many more alongside the solicited authors we've planned to publish from the start. I'll be writing more thorough breakdowns of our first open submissions period in a later issue for anyone who is curious.

Some of our issues will have themes (like February's Space Needs Mers theme), and some won't (like this issue, which has different threads of connections between pieces, but no overarching theme – aside from the obvious mer-theme, of course). The thing we most want is a great variety of types of pieces and of ways to interpret merfolk. For this reason, we're also always committed to finding different perspectives, marginalized voices, and things both old and new. Heck yes, we're reprinting things! Tons of stories and poems and art pieces exist that any given reader may or may not have ever seen, and we are excited to share some of the ones we found while combing the sea floor.

Most of all, I envisioned this project as fun, an experiment, and a chance to engage in creative play. We're not trying to make a huge profit here. Just trying to give everyone something fun to look forward to in the year 2021, year two of our global pandemic, and a time when

Tracking Treasure

Now for an update on the tardy backing rewards! The pins have been finished and are on their way to us! The stickers are in the last stage of production and we expect them to be shipped to us by the end of the month. Big thanks to Geri Sullivan for her assistance with the stickers! There are a handful of other rewards that haven't made it to the Mermaid Home Cave yet,

I think all of us could use a break. I include our staff in that. I want to pay them, and I also want to know that they aren't feeling burnt out and overwhelmed. Burnout is extremely real, especially this year, so we're operating with a much less rigid idea of deadlines than we might if we were a big corporate concern. This means, among other things, we don't really announce far in advance what our exact publication dates will be. We aim for once a month, and we aim to give our subscribers a little time to swim around in the mermaid lagoon before we invite everyone else in, but other than that... it's flexible.

If you want to support us, we do have subscription options, including a Patreon, which offers some behind the scenes glimpses as well as the chance to personally sponsor some of our content. All your support goes directly into production and acquiring more awesome things to share!

by Meg Frank

like the hand bound zines and two of the crowns. These things are late because I didn't budget enough time to juggle so many delayed processes - sorry! HUGE thanks to our Logistics Wizard Lis Hulin-Wheeler, who has been absolutely on top of all of the mail and has been helping me track the and unplug this bottleneck!

Our Contributors

Baz Kanold is an emerging Canadian mixed media artist whose artwork investigates and celebrates queerness, sexuality, and the fluidity of gender identity. They frequently explore these things through the lens of fantasy, which allows for a level of escapism and freedom that the real world does not. While they are a mixed media artist, they focus on oil painting, conté or pencil on paper, and digital drawing for their illustrations. Their work has previously been featured in the Ignition Exhibition presented by Hamilton Artist's Inc. and the 2020 Montreal Pride Online Art Exhibition presented by Gallea.

After living in various parts of the country, **Brigit Truex** left California's Sierra Nevada mountains for the flatter, milder section of Kentucky's Blue Grass plateau. With a heritage of First Nations (Abenaki/Cree), French Canadian, and Irish, it is no surprise that the natural world has greatly influenced her poetry. Her work has been included in various international journals and anthologies, including *About Place*, *apt*, *Yellow Medicine Review*, and others. She was a finalist for both the Locked Horn Press prize and Hopper Journal Prize. Her latest collection, *Sierra Silk*, is available on Amazon. Her website is booksandsuchbybrigittruex.wordpress.com.

David Bowles is a Mexican-American author and translator from south Texas. Among his two dozen books are *A Kingdom Beneath the Waves*, *Chupacabra Vengeance*, *Rise of the Halfling King* and the forthcoming graphic novel series *Clockwork Curandera*. His work has also been published in venues such as *The New York Times*, *Strange Horizons*, *Apex Magazine*, and *Rattle, Translation Review*.

Grainne Quinlan is a poet and writer originally from Dublin in Ireland. Much of Grainne's work is inspired by nature and the landscape of The Burren in the west of Ireland, where she now lives. Poetic form is something Grainne is especially interested in, and she has taken much influence from the poetry of Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Grainne has an MA in Creative Writing and English from the University of Limerick where she also works as a student tutor.

Jennifer Hudak is a speculative fiction writer fueled mostly by tea. Her short fiction has appeared in venues such as *khōréō*, *Flash Fiction Online*, *Apparition Lit*, and *Translunar Travelers Lounge*, among others. (continued on pg 44)

Our Contributors

Jennifer Hudak (cont.) Originally from Boston, she now lives with her family in Upstate New York where, in addition to writing, she teaches yoga, knits tiny pocket-sized animals, and misses the ocean. Find her on Twitter [@writerunyoga](#), or visit her at [jenniferhudakwrites.com](#)

K(atherine) Garcia Ley is a speculative fiction author who lives and writes in Gaithersburg, MD. Her short fiction has been published in *Daily Science Fiction*. She is an alumna of VONA and the Hurston Wright Foundation. Find her at [katherineley.com](#) and [@iamkatherineley](#).

Karen Porter Sorensen is a writer, performance artist, and sea swimmer based in the West Coast of Ireland. Most recently her work was featured on the RTE Radio 1 show Sunday Miscellany. Her art and writing have been presented internationally in museums, galleries and performance spaces in Chicago, New York and Ireland. She spent seven years researching love on New York City's streets; the results of her findings *love (luv) n.* was published by Adams Media in 2010. She received a BA in theatre at University of Wisconsin, Madison, followed by an MFA in performance at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She is currently creating an audio trail podcast for the Flaggy Shore in the Burren.

Nivedita Sekar is someone who writes and draws, and does a lot of things inside the intersection of both (comics! animation! short stories!) She grew up in the south, making friends by magic and learning to drive in thunderstorms. Now she lives in New York, where she spends her winters trying not to slip on the sidewalks.

Sara Eileen Hames is a mixed media artist and writer working in Brooklyn, NY. Ze makes art about monsters, emotions, landscapes, and other aggressively beautiful things, prioritizing detail, color, and tenderness. Sara's art has appeared in four solo shows and several group shows, most recently at the Carrie Able Gallery where ze was an artist in residence in the summer of 2020. Hir poetry, short fiction, and illustration have been published internationally. Ze holds an undergraduate degree from Columbia University, and a Masters of Creative Writing from The University of Sydney. When not making art, ze parents two small whirlwinds in the shapes of human children. Find hir on Twitter and Instagram [@saraeileen](#).

About Us

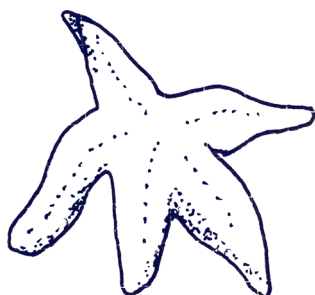
Julia Rios (they/them) is a queer, Latinx writer, editor, podcaster, and narrator whose fiction, non-fiction, and poetry have appeared in *Latin American Literature Today*, *Lightspeed*, and *Goblin Fruit*, among other places. Their editing work has won multiple awards including the Hugo Award. Julia is a co-host of *This is Why We're Like This*, a podcast about the movies we watch in childhood that shape our lives, for better or for worse. They've narrated stories for *Escape Pod*, *Podcastle*, *Pseudopod*, and *Cast of Wonders*. They're [@omgjulia](#) on Twitter.

Ashley Deng (she/her) is a Canadian-born Chinese-Jamaican writer with a love of fantasy and all things Gothic. She studied biochemistry with a particular interest in making accessible the often-cryptic world of science and medicine. When not writing, she spends her spare time overthinking society and culture and genre fiction. Her work has appeared at *Nightmare Magazine*, *Fireside Magazine*, and *Queen of Swords Press* and you can find her at [aedeng.wordpress.com](#) or on Twitter at [@ashesandmochi](#).

Meg Frank (they/them) is a Hugo-nominated artist based in New York. In the before times they traveled a lot and spent a lot of time looking up in museums. Currently they are keeping themselves busy with art school, two cats, knitting for their family, and this magazine. They're [@peripateticmeg](#) on Twitter.

Lis Hulin Wheeler (she/her) lives outside Boston with her spouse and child and spends her days chasing mail carriers and citing obscure postal regulations.

Find her on [Twitter](#) or [Goodreads](#) and her work at *Ninestar Press* and *The Future Fire*. She also serves as Fiction Editor and Logistics Manager for *Wizards in Space Literary Magazine* ([check them out!](#)) and slushreads for various genre publications.



- a little squished, still a star

