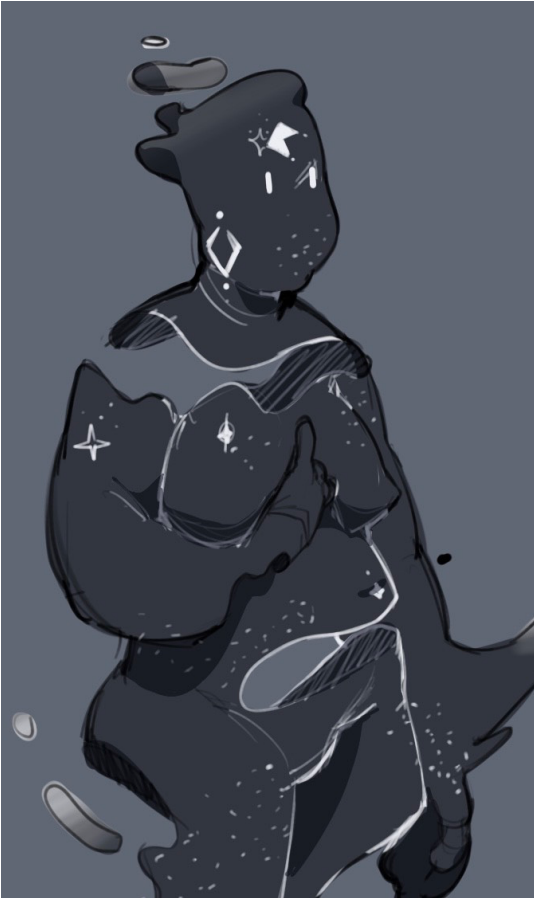


# FOR PAGE & SCREEN MAGAZINE

Issue no. 5, March 2024



Cover Artwork by Tancil Martin

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# *For Page & Screen Magazine*

Issue 5, 2024

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## Featured Cover Art

By Tancil Martin



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Guest cover artist TANCIL MARTIN is an artist and student currently studying at Arcadia University.

# Interfaith Exorcism

Screenplay by

Vanessa Bloom

FADE IN:

EXT. NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

A neighborhood of plain houses in a typical suburban cul-de-sac. One house sits empty, a FOR SALE sign swinging in the breeze. A tired minivan chugs into the driveway of the house next door.

INT./EXT. MINIVAN - CONTINUOUS

DINAH O'CONNELL (60, Ashkenazi Jewish, haggard) drives while RON O'CONNELL (62, Irish Catholic, flabby) scrolls Facebook on his jumbo smartphone. Middle age has hit them hard and they're stuck.

RON

(not looking up)

I'm going for the marble casket.

DINAH

Those cost over ten thousand dollars. You gonna be buried with your gold and jewels, too?

RON

Like excavating Ancient  
Rome, they'll dig me up in  
2,000 years and marvel at  
my sarcophagus.

Dinah turns off the car, looks out the window to  
the for-sale sign.

DINAH

Think that house'll ever  
sell?

RON

Probably scared off by the  
tremors.

DINAH

It's California,  
earthquakes are expected.  
And this is a nice  
neighborhood.

RON

Used to be nicer.

DINAH

Oh, of course, it could've  
been nicer.

RON

Whaddy want me to say?

DINAH

Something besides a  
complaint. All you did was  
say the plot was too

(MORE)

DINAH (CONT'D)  
small, it had too many  
trees, the headstone  
wasn't big enough...

The pair get out of the car, still arguing.

RON  
I think I have the right  
to be picky about my  
gravesite. I'll only be  
there the rest of my  
afterlife!

INT. HOUSE - BEDROOM - LATER

It's a boring middle-class interior with 1970s fixtures and worn carpets. Dinah and Ron are getting ready for bed, moving through their routine mindlessly, still quarreling.

DINAH  
Did you take your  
medication?

RON  
You always ask me, and the  
answer is always the same!  
The doctor said I'll be  
fine. I am fine!

DINAH  
Just making sure! You're  
the one who wanted to go  
look at cemeteries today,  
for God's sake.

Ron waves his hand dismissively.

DINAH (CONT'D)

The kids and I need you.  
Above ground.

RON

Speaking of, I thought we  
were living in California  
for the kids. Didn't plan  
to be buried here too.

DINAH

(slightly sarcastic)  
Where should we be buried?  
Next to your mom in  
Boston? Or your dad in Des  
Moines?

RON

I never pictured eternity  
in Orange County,  
California. That's all.

DINAH

Better than Orange County,  
Florida, which is where I  
schlep to see my parents'  
graves. This'll be easier,  
California's a tourist  
destination. The kids'll  
visit the cemetery.

RON

We're alive in California  
now and they don't visit.

DINAH

Rach's been busy with grad  
school. You know that. And  
Peter-



RON

Comes when he needs money.

DINAH

Exactly. He can raid your  
marble tomb for gold  
amulets.

She gets into her side of the bed and Ron gets into his. Dinah puts on her C-Pap machine. They turn out the light.

LATER

Dinah's C-pap machine whirs. Ron's asleep with earplugs in, phone still in hand.

Thud! A bump from the attic above. The bed where Dinah and Ron sleep shakes. A DEMONIC GREEN LIGHT radiates on the ceiling, coiling like a snake before disappearing. Dinah bolts up, struggling with the C-Pap machine.

DINAH

(muffled by the C-Pap)  
Did ya hear that?

She yanks off the mask. Ron's still asleep. Dinah punches him in the arm.

DINAH (CONT'D)

Ron, wake up!

Ron jolts awake, grabbing his arm.

RON

(yelling)

WHAT?

DINAH

Shh!

Ron takes out his earplugs.

RON

Why'd you hit me?

DINAH

You need to wake up!

RON

Goddamnit, what is it?

DINAH

I heard something.

Ron rolls his eyes.

RON

Your breathing machine's  
on.

He goes to put his earplugs back, but Dinah stops him.

DINAH

Something else. And the  
bed moved!

RON

It's probably just another  
quake.

(quoting Dinah from  
earlier)

"It's California,  
earthquakes are expected."

DINAH

Fine. Sorry I woke you.

They both roll away from each other and pull the covers up. Another thud and the light returns briefly, slipping through the cracks from the attic above. This time both Dinah and Ron see it.

DINAH (CONT'D)

What's that!?

RON

Jesus Mary and Joseph!

They both clutch each other on the bed, Dinah's breath fogging her C-Pap mask. The light winds its way across the ceiling before disappearing again.

RON (CONT'D)

I got it.

He reaches behind the headboard, pulling out a handgun, aiming at the ceiling. He fires one shot, which puts a bullet hole in the ceiling and the green light spills through. Ron fires and reloads again, and another, until-

DINAH

Are you outta your mind?!

Dinah grabs his arm, trying to wrestle the gun away.

RON

Let go of me, woman!

DINAH

You're ruining the  
drywall!

RON

I'm scaring it! I got it!

The green light hasn't moved. He reloads and pulls the trigger again -- only for the gun to be empty. Ron opens his nightstand.

RON (CONT'D)

Where's my ammo?!

He dumps the drawer on the floor. Lots of junk and knick-knacks, but only an empty box of ammo.

DINAH

You promised me you'd  
gotten rid of that gun.

RON

It's for protection.

DINAH

Fat lot of good it's doing  
now!

They both look at the green light. Ron aims the gun and desperately pulls the trigger, only for it to click pathetically. The light swirls, turning red.

DINAH (CONT'D)

You made it mad!

RON

It's a demon! They're  
always mad!

Ron throws the gun down.

RON (CONT'D)

We need to call a priest.

DINAH

For what?

RON

An exorcism!

DINAH

You hated going to mass.  
Since when have you  
believed all of that  
stuff?

RON

Since there's a demon on  
my ceiling!

Ron begins to pray quickly, trying to recall the words:

RON (CONT'D)

*Our Father, who... who are  
in heaven, hallowed be thy  
name. Thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done...uh, I  
have a gun...No, Wait.  
Please forget? Forgive!  
Forgive those who trespass  
against us; and lead us  
not into temptation, but  
deliver us from evil.  
AMEN!*

He crosses himself and looks back at the ceiling.  
The light flickers. Ron grabs his phone and  
begins frantically scrolling his contacts.

RON (CONT'D)

Shit! I don't have a contact saved. Father Graham? Gorman? Dinah, what's the name of that priest I used to go to?

DINAH

The one who advised us not to marry?

Ron furiously puts his hands over Dinah's mouth.

RON

Shhhh!!!!

(to the demon)

God, please forgive me. I know I called myself a lapsed Catholic, I don't go to mass, I take the name of the Lord in vain, and I once went to a Presbyterian church just to see what it was like, but I'll do anything you want just please remove the demon from my attic. Amen.

The light flickers but still glows. Ron looks at his overturned drawer.

RON (CONT'D)

Do you have my rosary?

DINAH

You're asking a Jewish woman for a cross?

RON

Maybe it's in your drawer!

He tries to crawl over Dinah to get to her nightstand.

DINAH

It's not there!

RON

Just look! Please!

Dinah quickly digs through her drawer. Nothing but chapstick, C-Pap parts, and a limp dildo.

DINAH

I told you. When's the last time you saw it? It had to be before we were married because I never saw you pray.

RON

I know! I should've prayed harder!

He continues to cross himself. The light swirls in place, not leaving.

RON (CONT'D)

*Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned-*

Ron grabs Dinah's hand.

RON (CONT'D)

You gotta do it to. C'mon.

DINAH

Have you forgotten? I'm  
not Catholic!

RON

When's the last time  
you've been to synagogue?

DINAH

Once a Jew, always a Jew.

RON

You think a demon is gonna  
make an exception if  
you're Jewish?

DINAH

We've had enough earthly  
suffering. It'd be nice to  
have a break for a change.

The ceiling creaks. Both Ron and Dinah huddle  
closer in bed.

RON

(crossing himself,  
showing Dinah)  
I think I got it this  
time:

RON (CONT'D)

*Our Father, who art in  
heaven, hallowed be  
thy name. Thy kingdom  
come, thy will be  
done, on earth, as it  
is in heaven. Give us*

DINAH

*Our Father, who art in  
heaven, hallowed be  
thy name. Thy kingdom  
come, thy will be  
done, on earth, as it  
is in heaven. Give us*

(MORE)



*this day our daily  
bread and forgive us  
our trespasses as we  
forgive those who  
trespass against us;  
and lead us not into  
temptation, but  
deliver us from evil.*

*this day our daily  
bread and forgive us  
our trespasses as we  
forgive those who  
trespass against us;  
and lead us not into  
temptation, but  
deliver us from evil.*

They cross their chests then stare at the ceiling. Dinah coughs.

DINAH (CONT'D)  
Do you think it's happy?  
(to the demon)  
Sir, did you like the  
prayer?  
(to Ron)  
Is that how it's done?

The DEMON above hisses, light winding across the ceiling. The bed rattles.

RON  
No. No, I think it's even  
angrier!

DINAH  
Probably because a Jewish  
woman said a Catholic  
prayer!

Ron makes the sign of the cross with his hands.

RON  
Get back! The power of  
Christ repels you!

The hissing increases and Ron and Dinah pull the covers over their heads.

UNDER THE COVERS

RON (CONT'D)

I'm too young to die! (a beat) This is because I considered being buried in an Episcopalian cemetery.

DINAH

(hurt)

You know I can't be buried with you in a Catholic cemetery!

RON

Well, clearly, God isn't happy with me!

DINAH

So he's unhappy with me? Because you married a Jewish woman you're being punished?

RON

Well... no, I don't think so, but the Priest said we shouldn't marry-

DINAH

Because I was a chainsmoking hippie! He didn't know I was Jewish.

Dinah breaks out wheezing, grasping her chest.

DINAH (CONT'D)  
My inhaler- It's in the  
kitchen-

Ron grabs Dinah's hands.

RON  
Okay, okay, just try and  
breathe...

DINAH  
If I die, where are you  
gonna bury me?

RON  
I dunno? I always figured  
I'd go first!

DINAH  
You will. But if I do die  
before you, you're not  
gonna leave me alone in  
some hole in the ground  
while you gallivant off to  
the Catholic cemetery?

RON  
No. NO! Of course not.  
Deep breath, one, two,  
three...

Dinah's breath finally slows.

DINAH  
You don't think it was a  
mistake we married?

RON  
(ashamed)  
Of course not.

He grabs Dinah's hand.

RON (CONT'D)  
Are there things in  
Judaism that could repel  
spirits? Are there Jewish  
ghosts? Jhosts? Heh.

Dinah elbows him.

DINAH  
There aren't prayers to  
get rid of ghosts. We  
aren't like you, with your  
exorcisms.

RON  
Then what do we do? Call a  
Rabbi? Give the ghost a  
Bar mitzvah?

Dinah shoots him an "are you serious" look.

RON (CONT'D)  
Maybe the ghost is 13  
years old! I'm just  
throwing stuff out here.

Ron wrings his hands. The two slowly peep out from the covers. The entire room is darker now, with a thick, blood-like substance dripping down the walls. The door is now blocked by thick, oozing blood.

DINAH

We just painted.

They share a desperate glance.

DINAH (CONT'D)

I only remember a few  
blessings.

RON

Quick! Which ones?

DINAH

The blessing over bread.

RON

Bread?

DINAH

There's one for wine too.

RON

WINE? This is a grade-A  
demonic being! We need  
hardcore Judaism. Where's  
the prayer for vanquishing  
your enemies?

DINAH

We have a song for  
protection. You sing it  
when you're going to  
sleep.

RON

We're gonna sing to the  
demon to sleep?

DINAH

What choice do we have?

Ron clears his throat.

RON

Okay. Let's sing that  
song.

DINAH

(singing)

*Hashkiveinu Adonai  
Eloheinu l' shalom /  
v'ha'amideinu malkeinu  
l'khayim tovim ul'  
shalom...*

RON

Okay. I'm gonna need it  
again.

They sing the song again. The light twists,  
agitated. Growling and hissing from the ceiling  
above. More blood drips on the bed now.

RON (CONT'D)

It doesn't like that  
either. Oh, God, we're  
gonna die. And I'm going  
to hell for being a  
heretic. Since before the  
kids, before I met you.  
You're the best thing  
that's ever happened to  
me. I'm just a sinner.

He crosses himself frantically.

DINAH

If it makes you feel  
better, Jewish people  
don't believe in hell.

RON

No hell? What about  
heaven?

DINAH

Nah.

RON

Wow. That's...kinda nifty,  
actually. How did I never  
know this?

DINAH

We never talked about it.  
Anything religious,  
really.

RON

I guess that's why our  
kids are atheists who  
don't visit us.

(a long beat)

Maybe we should've talked  
about it.

DINAH

If the Buddhists are right  
about reincarnation, we  
can do it in our next  
lives.

They stare in silence at the dripping blood. Some  
of it lands on Dinah's head. Ron wipes it off. By  
now, the blood is soaking the sheets.

DINAH (CONT'D)

The kids'll be okay without us. Right. Right?

RON

Of course. Rachel'd force Peter to actually get a real job.

DINAH

And Peter'd make sure she wasn't working too hard.

They share a laugh. The red light grows brighter.

RON

I guess we're gonna see whose religion is right about death.

DINAH

See you there.

They look at the ceiling and grasp hands. By coincidence, they begin to pray at the same time.

RON

*Our Father, who art in  
heaven, hallowed be  
thy name. Thy kingdom  
come, thy will be  
done-*

DINAH (CONT'D)

(singing)  
*Hashkiveinu Adonai  
Eloheinu l' shalom /  
v'ha'amideinu malkeinu  
l'khayim-*

Suddenly, the demon hisses. The light retreats momentarily. Dinah and Ron stop.



RON (CONT'D)

Do you see that?

The light grows again.

RON (CONT'D)

It didn't like our prayer.

They look at each other and begin to recite in earnest. As they recite their respective prayers, the blood begins to retract into the walls, light dimming.

RON (CONT'D)

*Our Father, who art in  
heaven, hallowed be  
thy name. Thy kingdom  
come, thy will be  
done, on earth, as it  
is in heaven. Give us  
this day our daily  
bread and forgive us  
our trespasses as we  
forgive those who  
trespass against us;  
and lead us not into  
temptation, but  
deliver us from evil.*

DINAH

*Hashkiveinu Adonai  
Eloheinu l' shalom /  
v'ha'amideinu malkeinu  
l'khayim tovim ul'  
shalom / uf'ros aleinu  
sukat sh'lomekha /  
v'takneinu b'eitzah  
tovah milfane'kha  
v'hoshi'einu /  
m'heirah l'ma'an  
sh'mekha.*

DINAH (CONT'D)

Again!

RON

(corny DJ voice)

TIME FOR THE REMIX!

RON (CONT'D)

*Hashkiveinu Adonai  
Eloheinu l' shalom /  
v'ha'amideinu malkeinu  
l'kheyim tovim ul'  
shalom / uf'ros aleinu  
sukat sh'lomekha /  
v'takneinu b'eitzah  
tovah milfane'kha  
v'hoshi'einu /  
m'heirah l'ma'an  
sh'mekha.*

DINAH

*Our Father, who art in  
heaven, hallowed be  
thy name. Thy kingdom  
come, thy will be  
done, on earth, as it  
is in heaven. Give us  
this day our daily  
bread and forgive us  
our trespasses as we  
forgive those who  
trespass against us;  
and lead us not into  
temptation, but  
deliver us from evil.*

As they finish the final word, the demonic spirit lifts. The room returns to normal, as though nothing had ever touched it. Even the bullet holes have somehow disappeared.

DINAH (CONT'D)

We did it!

Ron and Dinah embrace. They get out of bed, inspecting the walls, the sheets, the ceiling. Dinah pulls back the curtains to the window.

DINAH (CONT'D)

Look, Ron!

She points out the window. In the house for sale next door, the attic gleams with green light.

RON

Oh, that house'll never  
sell.

INT/EXT. MINIVAN - EVENING - LATER

Ron and Dinah's minivan chugs up their driveway.

DINAH

We finally figured it out.

Ron leans over to kiss Dinah on the cheek.

RON

Thank you for letting me  
get the gold-plated marble  
casket.

DINAH

If there is heaven and  
hell, God will judge you  
for that monstrosity.

RON

But you'll be there to help  
me out. Because we're going  
next to each other in the  
nondenominational cemetery.

A U-Haul pulls into the driveway next door. Ron and Dinah look over to see a "SOLD" sign on the now-possessed house.

RON (CONT'D)

Oh no.

A YOUNG COUPLE (20s) get out of the U-Haul. She's Muslim with a hijab and he's Buddhist with mala beads around his neck.

MUSLIM WOMAN

Hello! We're your new  
neighbors.

DINAH

We have a lot to talk about.

CUT TO BLACK.

.....

VANESSA BLOOM is a writer from Orange County, California. Adopted from China in 1999 into a multifaith American family, her own unique upbringing has inspired her love of stories. Her work has appeared at the South Eastern European Film Festival, The Valley Film Festival, NFFTY, The Braid Theater, and more. When she is not writing, Vanessa is probably laughing at history memes or walking her dogs. Find all her links here <https://linktr.ee/vanessabloom>.

# Just One More Bird

by Mirm Hurula

*Dear Brook,*

*Please come home. You've been out in the wilderness for too long. I'm afraid you'll die out there before seeing the life we've built here in the city. A life we want with you. Come as you are. Come with whoever you've become—whoever you've found. Please come home.*

*Just let us see you one last time.*

*Mom*

\* \* \*

Our world isn't like before. Communication across vastness isn't possible anymore. I'm the only one that travels long distances these days. The world is in shambles and people want to know if those they love are still alive. Their yearnings and deepest secrets put onto a piece of paper for me to give to another—another that may not even be alive.

Often, the writers would fall to their knees, tears soaking my third pair of sneakers from the trip. Morbid news is my companion across long journeys.

Almost always, I carry and read letters to the dead or to those with little life left. Crossing over arbitrary lines to new places and hellscape to traverse. Only needing to tell the gun pointed at me that I'm delivering letters. The world making itself beautiful again once I walk out of city walls so high migrating birds must fly around. Though, the city hasn't seen birds in years.

I write to the birds on the grass and in the sky when I hear their songs. They never respond. And, they have yet to return a letter.

Just like I have yet to return with a response.

An impassible part of my journey between two mountains. I look up admiring them. I've never seen another as tall. They were too

tall for me to climb over them. I would have to go through the path between them.

Nothing good ever happens in tight spaces like that.

As I enter, I hear gasping and cries in the distance and run as fast as the sound. The woman bleeding from her stomach, begging me to save her. Her words jumbled together like a priest giving themselves last rites. I don't know what to say—I know I can't save her. I choose to tell her anything she wants to hear. She will be okay. Her family will be safe. She'll see them all again soon. With the last tears streaming from her eyes, I'm met with her lifeless stare—one of many already seen.

I leave her body there for a creature to come looking for something to eat. I'd rather it eat her dead body than chase mine. After leaving her body, I reread the letter I was told to deliver to bring me back to my assignment.

*Dear Brook,*

*Please come home. You've been out in the wilderness for too long. I'm afraid you'll die out there before seeing the life we've built here in the city. A life we want with you. Come as you are. Come with whoever you've become—whoever you've found. Please come home.*

*Just let us see you one last time.*

*Mom*

I think out loud about what the mother did to her child to force them out—to go away from the safety of the city. It was dangerous enough for me to be walking outside of it with the bits of knowledge that I procured. But luck always finds its way to my side, washing over me every night to keep the beasts occupied—with speech or otherwise.

The other side of these mountains holds a spectacle. Lush green grass hugging the sides of a clear lake. Pink and white flowers littering the ground like the specks of dirt dancing with the city's artificial wind. The sky filled with tall billowing clouds, circling the center of the lake. The sky reflecting in the lake almost like at the tip of the ocean.

The air was still and silent. Not a single bird to be heard—not a flap of their wings.

I sit and write:

*Dear Bird,*

*Why haven't you made this lake your home? This is the most beautiful scene I have seen in all my travels. The air is clear. There are no smells. This could become your perfect home—a sanctuary. I would write letters to you every day and read them as you danced on the ground or chased the sky.*

*Oh, bird, why haven't you made this lake your home? You and your chicks would fly high with not a disturbance for miles. A peaceful sight, a wonderful silence, only echoing chirps bouncing from mountainside to mountainside. Clear waters to wash and clean waters to drink.*

*Bird, come to this place so that we may live.*

*Please, let me see you this one last time.*

---

MIRM HURULA is an emerging Samoan author and poet taking their time to slowly investigate and write in literary genres they've been interested in since they were in elementary school. In their fiction writing, Mirm tends to gravitate toward science fiction and fantasy as these are their favorite genres of scripted media. They received a fellowship for Martha's Vineyard's Institute for Creative Writing's Conference in Summer 2021. And in August of 2022, they were accepted and participated in the Anaphora's Writing Residency, now labeled as an Anaphora fellow. Mirm incorporates Brown and queer stories into every piece they work to give representation they craved as a young avid reader. They hope that their stories can uplift and center voices that have never been a part of the mainstream.

# A Trip to Barbados

by Matias Travieso-Diaz

*Take me to this land  
of sweet sugar cane and Mount Gay Rum,  
I want to taste its sweetness  
and feel its tropical sun,  
Take me to Barbados!*  
—Charmaine J. Forde

The rice harvest had ended in February and when Aisha Oludara sought work on the cassava crop, she was turned away. Finding herself without employment, she took her troubles to her uncle Momoh. “Aisha, we are poor and I can hardly manage to keep my family fed. You need to leave Kambia and go to the coast, where you should be able to get work.”

She gritted her teeth and accepted. “Thank you so much, Uncle. I will do as you counsel. But, how do I get to the coast? It’s too dangerous for a single woman to walk there.”

“My friend Sheku will leave soon for Mambolo, taking a cart with the swamp rice he grows to a mill there. I’ll ask him to take you with him.”

“Will I find work in Mambolo?”

“Seidu Koroma, a cousin of Sheku’s late wife, is the chieftain at Mambolo. You will be under Koroma’s protection. He’ll get you work.”

\* \* \*

They set off at a brisk pace but, upon arrival at the Mombolo rice mill, they found it already closed. A group of young men, idling on the square across from the building, quickly surrounded the cart.

“Please tell Seidu Koroma that his cousin Sheku is here.”



An older man then came forward: “Seidu Koroma isn’t here anymore.”

Sheku was shaken by this news. “Where is he?”

“He and his three wives were taken to the slave market in Tasso Island. The Temnes are out. We, the Susu, are in control now. I’m Ibrahim Kanu, Chief of the Mambolo District. And Temnes like you are not welcome here.”

Chief Kanu then gave Aisha an appraising eye.

“What do we have here?” he questioned with a leer. “A young girl?”

“Let her be!” screamed Sheku. “She’s only fifteen!”

There were yowls and guffaws all around him.

“And she’s a virgin!” he added, in desperation.

One of the young men, excited by this revelation, began to tug at Aisha’s blouse. A bark by Chief Kanu froze him on his tracks.

“Stop, everybody, and quiet down. Let’s take these Temnes down to Tasso Island. We’ll go south in the morning.”

\* \* \*

Tamba Sesay was the Chief of the Pepel territory, which comprised Tasso Island. As luck would have it, he was on the island when Chief Kanu arrived bringing a desiccated Temne oldster and a stunning young girl. Sesay broke into a wide smile when he recognized his colleague.

Kanu returned the grin and gave his customer a respectful handshake: “My friend, I came personally to deliver a special treat for you.”

Sesay frowned. “That old man is more dead than alive. How can he be a treat?”

“No, my friend. Not him. He’s nothing. You can have him for free, and if you can’t sell him, you can feed him to the dogs. I’m talking about the girl. She is a princess from the Kambia region, she is beautiful, and she is a virgin to boot. Ain’t that precious?”

Sesay replied: “But my friend, I already have two wives and several concubines. What use could I have for a child, pretty as she may be?”

“No, my friend, she is not for you. I expect that the Western traders would pay good money for a girl in the bloom of her youth.”

“That may be so, but most slaves are purchased to be resold as field workers or craftsmen, not bedmates. Marketing a potential concubine is risky.”

“Well, you know about your business better than I. Perhaps I’ll take these captives to Bunce Island and try my luck there.”

“Perhaps. Anyhow, what are you asking for her?”

Kanu grasped his chin. “Depends on what you have.”

Bargaining was conducted in low voices for some time, until at the end Kanu declared:

“My friend, you drive a hard bargain, but we have a long relation. I will accept your offer, as long as you throw in some textiles. Do you have any?”

“Of course, I do.”

“And how about some rum?”

“Yes, let us drink a cup together.”

The Chiefs clasped hands again.

\* \* \*

The Royal African Company had built in Tasso Island a fortified compound designed to hold slaves and other trading goods until winds were blowing in a favorable direction for sailing ships to travel from England and to the ports where the goods would be sold. Sheku and Aisha were imprisoned in that compound for many weeks awaiting transportation.

Their wait was over when *Bucephalus* dropped anchor on Tasso Island.

*Bucephalus* was a two-hundred-ton English brig, a large vessel with two square rigged masts whose hull had been modified to create a hold so it could transport slaves. It had a crew of twenty men led by Captain Jason Roberts, a brutal man who had made half a dozen trips on the triangular trade route (England to West Africa to America to England).

Roberts was hoping to load as many as four hundred slaves and transport them to Barbados, where they would be sold to sugar plantation owners. By the time he arrived, Sesay had provided to the Royal African

Company only two hundred or so captives. That number did not meet the instructions from the consortium that owned *Bucephalus*. He was to make sure it travelled full of slaves, to maximize profits and ward against the inevitable losses during the passage. Thus, Roberts agreed to buy the available captives as a lot and wait on the island in hope of further arrivals.

Because they were sold as a lot, no separate deal was struck for Aisha, who was part of the crowd of hungry and scared prisoners. Her head had been shaved and she was covered in rags. She was just another filthy soon-to-be slave, almost unnoticed among her fellow captives.

Almost, but not entirely, unnoticed. The moment Aisha was shoved onboard the ship and into the women's section of the hold, Sebastian Currey followed her with covetous eyes. Sebastian was the First Mate, second only to Captain Roberts and sharing many of the captain's duties while having many others of his own. His most important tasks, however, related to the human cargo. Sebastian oversaw the security of the vessel, making sure the enslaved were kept under control, checking their chains closely and placing sentinels on guard in the men's holds. He was also responsible for the slaves' feeding, exercise, and health and kept them in as good a shape as possible.

\* \* \*

When they boarded *Bucephalus*, Aisha and the other women slaves were separated from the men and the children and crammed into their own compartment. She was chained to a narrow space without room to move or the possibility of standing up and was greeted by a loathsome stench.

Aisha became depressed and was unwilling to eat. When two sailors came around with bowls of rice and beans and offered her some of the food, she refused it. One of the sailors held Aisha fast by the hands while the other flogged her as an example to the other women.

The flogging ceased abruptly as a bearded white man, wearing better clothes than the rags that covered the sailors, came into the women's hold. Seeing the situation, he uttered a sharp command that even Aisha (who knew no English) understood: "Stop!" He waved the sailors away.

To Aisha's surprise, the man then spoke to her in Kissi, a language similar to Temne:

"Don't be scared. I'm Sebastian Currey, second in command of this ship, and I'll make sure you are not molested."

Aisha tried to focus her eyes and look at the stranger. In the dimness of the hold, she could see that the man was only a few years older than herself, very pale, with yellow hair and a scraggly beard, and piercing blue eyes.

"What's your name, and where are you from?" he continued.

"Sir, I'm Aisha, daughter of Thaimu Oludara. I'm from Kambia, upriver from Mambolo."

Sebastian took a good look at the captive. Beneath the grime and bruises lay a beautiful young woman. Aisha was fully figured, but not fat. Tall and shapely, she had a dark honey complexion and prominent cheekbones in an oval face dominated by lively brown eyes and a sensuous mouth.

"You're very pretty" admired Sebastian, seizing Aisha's face and squeezing her cheeks. Aisha cringed, and attempted to draw away from the man. Shackled as she was, though, there was little she could do to escape.

"You'll look better when you are cleaned up" he declared. "I'll send our cabin boy to give you a scrubbing."

Soon after Aisha had been sponged with warm water to wash away most of the dirt and grime, Sebastian returned accompanied by two sailors. "Remove her chains and bring her to my cabin. I'll meet you there," he ordered.

The sailors dragged Aisha into Sebastian's cabin and dropped her on the narrow bed. Sebastian, who was gazing at the bay out of a porthole, turned around and motioned to the sailors to leave.

"By Jove, Aisha," he exclaimed with mock surprise. "You are even prettier when clean."

Aisha started to tremble.

"Have no fear, lass. You should be glad to be here with me. Do you know what happens aboard a slave ship?" When she said nothing, he added: "It is common for our sailors to take the African women, and lie upon their bodies, and take their pleasure lying on the floor, in plain sight of everyone. I think it is a revolting spectacle, not befitting Christian men. Do you agree?"

Aisha continued to shake without uttering a sound.

“Come, child. I’ll be nice.” Aisha recoiled and attempted to make a run for the door. Sebastian’s next words stopped her cold: “I posted sailors outside. If you come out trying to escape, they’ll do naughty things to you.”

He seized her by the shoulder and, not too gently, dragged her to the bed.

\* \* \*

A dreadful routine developed. At some point every day, two sailors would remove Aisha’s chains and carry her to the first mate’s cabin, where Sebastian awaited. There would be small talk and the officer would lead Aisha to the bed. Later, he might offer her a bit of food and open the door of the cabin, letting the sailors seize Aisha, drag her belowdecks, and chain her again. He beat her when he was in a sour mood or drunk.

\* \* \*

Two weeks after the ship anchored in Tasso Island, the deaths began. Most of the casualties were from dysentery and fevers brought about or aggravated by the ship’s conditions. The air became unfit for respiration due to a variety of loathsome smells, and brought on sickness and eventual death. Three sailors also took ill and died.

As deaths mounted, the ship’s physician—one Robert Stubbs—was brought belowdecks to examine the captives. Those he found too infirm to recover were deemed to have suffered a "commercial death," and being of no value, were tossed overboard to drown. Aisha later learned that Sheku, her companion on the ill-fated trip to Mambolo, had been drowned with several other Temnes. She shed a few tears, but by then she had become so hardened that she took the death of her uncle’s friend as another atrocity by the white devils.

\* \* \*

Aisha had not been feeling well; she woke every morning needing to vomit, and felt nauseous throughout the day. She suffered

from severe headaches, which were aggravated by the tumbling of the ship.

One of the deposed Seidu Koroma's wives, who was chained next to Aisha, had a quick answer to her complaints:

"Girl, you are with child."

Aisha was stupefied and rejected the idea vehemently. "No, it can't be! I'm only fifteen!"

The other woman smiled bitterly and replied: "I had my first baby when I was thirteen. Any time after your first blood you can become a mother."

"I don't want no child from that terrible man. I wanna get rid of the baby."

The woman commiserated: "On land, I could help you with that. Here on a ship, I could try massaging the baby out of your tummy, or shoving something sharp inside you, but you and the baby might die. Unless you want to chance dying, you'll have to keep him."

It took Aisha several days to gather enough courage to confront Sebastian. He reacted jovially: "That's great! Another slave to our cargo! You must start taking care of yourself! I'll see to it that you are able to take walks around the ship!" Aisha had to accept that carrying the baby to term was inevitable and tried to become used to becoming a mother.

\* \* \*

The day after Aisha announced her pregnancy, Sebastian walked to Captain Robert's cabin.

"Ah, Currey. Any novelty onboard?"

"No, Sir. But I've got a request."

"What's it?"

"I understand your contract provides, in addition to your pay, a privilege of two slaves for every 100 that arrive alive at our destination. Is that correct?"

"Yes. We have discussed that before."

"Right now, we have 353 men, women, and children on board. Assuming a fatality rate of fifty percent, which is standard, we'll arrive at Barbados with roughly 175 saleable slaves, which should give you a privilege of at least three, maybe four, slaves for you to own and be able to sell for a profit."

“Perhaps. What of it?”

“Sir, I would request to give back half of my pay to you in exchange for one of your slaves.”

Captain Roberts reacted coolly. “I’m afraid that’s impossible.”

“Sir, with respect, you never enter the hold of this ship, where the slaves are kept. I personally take that risk every day, as I risk a mutiny by the cutthroats in our crew. I gladly take all these risks for you, but I feel my remuneration is not equal to my responsibilities and the risks I assume.”

“Currey, I never heard of a captain exchanging a portion of his privilege for a few guineas, and am not about to be the first to do so.”

“But Sir, maybe you are not aware of this, but there are on board over two hundred members of one of the most ferocious African tribes. I’ve only fourteen men under my command. In the event of a riot, they’d sweep us aside and you’d soon be dead.”

Captain Roberts’ face became quite pale. “And how do you propose to safeguard the ship against that?”

“Sir, in some ships they cut off the legs of a few recalcitrant slaves to terrify the rest. I’m willing to take such a measure, but since it is sure to further inflame our cargo, I won’t do so unless I’m rewarded appropriately.”

An ominous silence ensued. Finally, Captain Roberts sighed. “Alright, Currey, you win. We’ll do what you want.”

“Great Sir. I’ll have the papers drawn and the agreement executed before Mr. Stubbs and a couple of witnesses.”

“Currey, do you have any particular slave you would like transferred to you?”

“I do, Sir, but sea travel being as hazardous as it is, I’d prefer to exercise my choice upon arrival in Barbados.”

\* \* \*

The journey from West Africa to the West Indies usually took about two and a half months. *Bucephalus*, however, encountered rough seas and fierce westerly winds that kept pushing it back in an easterly direction. Christmas drew near before *Bucephalus* was within sight of the city of Bridgetown, on the southwestern coast of Barbados. By that time, the slave population on board had decreased by forty percent. Of

about 210 remaining slaves, 28 had become crippled and were thrown overboard on the pretext that, as supplies were running low, the captain was justified in jettisoning part of his “cargo” in order to save the rest. Six more slaves, in horror at the inhumanity of the slavers, jumped into the sea. The 177 survivors included 110 males, 44 females and 23 children. One of the females was a very pregnant Aisha.

\* \* \*

The arrival of the slave ship was greeted with anticipation by the white inhabitants of Barbados, since the island’s 60,000 African and African-descended slaves were not enough to meet its sugar plantations’ requirements. There was to be an auction two days after the ship’s arrival and Captain Roberts and Sebastian Currey made busy unloading the slaves, penning them in temporary corrals, and arranging to meet with the representative of the ship’s owners.

Their contact was Archibald McBean, a solicitor that was to review the ship’s manifesto and other documents. Upon verification that there were 177 slaves in marketable condition, McBean stated: “Captain Roberts, according to the terms of your engagement, in addition to your wages you get a privilege. Your privilege entitles you to 2 and 3/4 slaves, which is rounded up to 3. Before tomorrow’s auction you must designate which of the slaves will constitute your privilege, so they can be released to you.”

At this point Sebastian interjected: “Captain Roberts and I have a side deal under which I am entitled to one of the privileged slaves.” He produced his contract to McBean, who perused it and returned it to Sebastian.

“Very well” he said. “Prior to the start of the auction, Captain Roberts will identify two slaves and Mr. Currey another, and you will tell me whether you wish to take possession or have them included in the auction.”

\* \* \*

It was a crisp, sunny winter morning as the crowds gathered in the square in front of Bridgetown Harbour to witness the slave auction. Both Captain Roberts and Sebastian Currey arrived a bit early, dressed



in their best finery but well-armed. McBean joined them and got down to the point. “Gentlemen, have you selected the three slaves that will be deeded to you as privilege?”

Sebastian and the Captain nodded their assent.

“Very well,” continued McBean. “Captain, you go first. What are your choices?”

Captain Roberts produced a folded piece of paper and read two names, belonging to healthy males identified by Mr. Stubbs, the physician.

“And you, Mr. Currey?”

“I choose Aisha Oludara.”

Captain Roberts gasped. “Isn’t she the woman who is close to term?”

“Indeed, she is.”

Captain Roberts became livid. “Wait a second. My deal with you was for one slave. You may have that Oludara woman but the child, when he’s born, is mine.”

Sebastian’s remained cool. “Captain, you don’t own the unborn child of Oludara. That boy or girl, if born alive, is mine, to be MY slave.”

“You were planning this from the moment you suggested our deal! You cheat!” screamed Captain Roberts.

McBean was about to intervene, but the captain did not give him a chance. Roberts quickly drew a pistol from his sash and took a shot point blank at Sebastian. Sebastian also drew out his pistol at almost the same time and shot Roberts in the head.

Both men fell to the ground. Sebastian had a large hole on his belly. Captain Roberts’ face was gone.

\* \* \*

Captain Roberts was perhaps the most fortunate of the two, since he died instantly. Sebastian agonized for three days as the mortal wound slowly took its toll on his body. As he lay in pain, he asked McBean to bring Aisha to him.

She came, wide eyed, to meet her tormenter. She stood by Sebastian’s bed watching as he, distorted in pain, took one labored breath after another.

McBean was about to leave, but a feeble motion from the bed stopped him.

“Please stay. I’d like to make provisions for my slave.” There was a pause as he gathered strength. “I want to grant her freedom.” Turning to Aisha, he explained: “Aisha, I’m setting you free. You can stay in Bridgetown, or try to find your way back to Africa or some other place.” Turning to McBean he continued in English: “I also want my wages for this trip to be given to this woman.”

“I’ll see to it, Mr. Currey. I’ll draft and come back later with the manumission papers,” replied McBean.

Sebastian turned to Aisha and continued: “I’ve relatives in England to whom I’m leaving a lot of money and any child of mine, even if illegitimate, may contest the dispositions in my will. I’ll grant you freedom in exchange for your promise to kill this child after his birth.”

“Why spare me and murder my child?” asked Alisha, her hands circled protectively around her belly.

“My time is now measured in hours. You’ve given me pleasure and deserve to live. That child is trouble and deserves nothing.”

Aisha blanched. “It’s like you to give me freedom at the price of the life of my own son. May my curse follow you beyond the grave!”

“Will you do it, though?”

Aisha spit on the floor and waved a menacing fist at the dying man, but nodded in acquiescence.

That evening, McBean brought the papers for Sebastian to sign. The dying man signed them with a trembling hand as Aisha towered over his bed.

Later that night, Aisha sneaked back into his room and suffocated Sebastian with a pillow. “I’m making sure you don’t change your mind,” she said venomously as she left the dead man.

\* \* \*

Aisha would tell a different version of the story to her daughter Amara, skipping the bad parts and concluding her lies in an uplifting tone: “Your father was a good man. He would have been a loving father to you.”

Amara, once an unwanted child and now the apple of Aisha's eye, nodded approvingly. She would grow free, and in time would become even more beautiful than her mother.

.....

Born in Cuba, MATIAS TRAVIESO-DIAZ, a gay writer, migrated to the United States as a young man to escape political persecution. He became an engineer and lawyer and practiced for nearly fifty years. After retirement, he took up creative writing. Over one hundred of his short stories have been published or accepted for publication in paying anthologies, magazines, blogs, audio books and podcasts. Some of his unpublished works have also received "honorable mentions" from a number of paying publications. A first collection of his stories, "The Satchel and Other Terrors" was released in February 2023 and is available from Amazon and other retailers.

# Old House, Old Screams

by Mirm Hurula

The sound of fingernails pierces the silent air. The old house had been abandoned for year and for good reason. It felt like ears would bleed if a mistake occurred even by just taking one wrong step toward it. The old house was a normal house. It was not built for school or college.

So how would the sound of a scratched chalkboard echo like a melancholic memory?

Footsteps slowly take up the dead space behind the chalkboard. Barely making a sound, filling my anxiety with every loud step. A foot stomping on my throat making it hard to breathe. Hands sweating, body shaking, legs frozen to the floorboards. What is it?

A voice screeching unintelligibly.

Footsteps as loud and large as my stomach.

Presence looming over as tall as a skyscraper.

Eyes piercing through backs of heads, witnessing inexcusable thoughts. Ones told by self to never mutter aloud. Whispers on either ear. Warm breath leaking down to the napes of your back. Chills running back up to your neck. From the breath, or from the thoughts being spoken aloud? Inner most thoughts, unexplainable dreams, childhood fears, familial trauma, murderous intent.

Blood rushing to every part of the body but the brain. No thoughts. The thoughts being force fed into an ear canal like another skull fuck.

The screeching from a chalkboard feels rhythmic—a harmony. Screeches turn to high singing—a banshee luring its next prey. Succumbed to singing, it doesn't matter anymore. Predator or prey—it always returns. Elation, joy, euphoria—to be met with bloody teeth and an unhinged jaw.

.....

MIRM HURULA is an emerging Samoan author and poet taking their time to slowly investigate and write in literary genres they've been interested in since they were in elementary school. In their fiction writing, Mirm tends to gravitate toward science fiction and fantasy as these are their favorite genres of scripted media. They received a fellowship for Martha's Vineyard's Institute for Creative Writing's Conference in Summer 2021. And in August of 2022, they were accepted and participated in the Anaphora's Writing Residency, now labeled as an Anaphora fellow. Mirm incorporates Brown and queer stories into every piece they work to give representation they craved as a young avid reader. They hope that their stories can uplift and center voices that have never been a part of the mainstream.

# Louisiana Shoal

By Mildred Lewis

## CHARACTERS

(in order of appearance)

Earlene (40s+, African American) A sturdy, pipe smoking fisherwoman in rain gear. Her only concessions to traditional femininity are beautifully done hair and elegant stud earrings. A light Louisiana accent.

Livia (20s+, African American) A post-doctoral fellow with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). She has forced the drab disaster worker uniform, a windbreaker and khakis, into a semblance of style.

## SETTING

A small lake near Paradis, LA in spitting distance of Union Carbide and Cancer Alley.

## TIME

Now. Just before dawn. Fall, better known as hurricane season.

*AT RISE:*

*IN DARKNESS, Zydeco music gives way to the sounds of a fire burning fish. Perhaps, there is smoke. A weak DAWN lights the stage as EARLENE stomps the fish ashes. Job done, she sits to enjoy her pipe. It's full of weed. The lake in front of her is illuminated by the surviving fish. They emit glimmering colored light.*

*Earlene finishes her pipe, grunts with pleasure, grabs her fishing rod, wades into the lake and casts.*

EARLENE

Dinner.

*LICIA runs in and immediately chokes on the toxic fish smoke.*

EARLENE

*(without turning)*

You all right over there?

*Licia coughs, struggles to nod. Earlene looks.*

EARLENE

Breathe shallow. Try to relax. Want some weed? Purifies the lungs. I might have some VapoRub in my bag.

*Licia vigorously shakes her head 'no,' but still can't quite catch her breath.*

EARLENE

You sure? We don't want nothing to happen to you. Something goes down wrong with a do-gooder, it stresses everybody out. Doesn't change anything, but ooooo the dust flies.

LICIA

You've got to get out of there!

EARLENE

Soon as I catch my dinner.

LICIA

What?! You can't eat that fish!

EARLENE

Why not? It's Friday. This is Louisiana.

LICIA

They're poisoned.

EARLENE

I took out the ones that were bad.

LICIA

*(points to the embers)*

The smoke?

EARLENE

I sure couldn't leave 'em for the crows. They don't know no better. Why should they suffer? These in here are all right.

LICIA

They're not. Please believe me.

EARLENE

Cancer Alley's not safe? Now there's some up-to-the-minute news. You must be with the feds.

LICIA

*(angering)*

Not every "fed"—

EARLENE

You got kids?



LICIA

Not yet.

EARLENE

If you had, you'd know to—

*(sings)*

“Take a deep breath and count to four.” Smoke’s starting to come out of your ears.

*(breathes)*

One, two, three, four. Don’t you love you some *Daniel Tiger*? My grandbaby turned me on to it.

LICIA

I appreciate...but we have to move. A storm’s coming. A cat six.

EARLENE

Mmm hmm. Felt something coming on a few days ago.

LICIA

Then may I ask what you’re waiting on?

EARLENE

You mean *wading* on?

*Earlene greatly enjoys her own joke.*

LICIA

It’s not that funny.

*Earlene grins. She can’t help herself.*

LICIA

You can’t hunker down in a cat six.

EARLENE

We used to. Oops! Not going to cancel me for that, are ya?

LICIA

Things change. We're not built for it anymore.

EARLENE

Damn straight we're not. Y'all good feds thinking about doing something about that? It's late in the day, but—

LICIA

Let's go!

*(beat)*

Ma'am.

EARLENE

Running through your training? How to deal with non-compliant seniors.

LICIA

Let's try again. I'll talk and you walk to me when you feel ready, okay? I'm Licia. Licia Knowles. What's your name?

EARLENE

Mrs. Earlene Iridessa Jackson. Buster's widow.

LICIA

Pleased to meet you Missus Jackson. I'm with the EPA.

EARLENE

That's a FEMA jacket.

LICIA

I'm on temporary assignment.

EARLENE

EPA jacket's got a better fit. Not that that matters. You've got a real nice figure. See? I notice things.

LICIA

I'm temporarily assigned to FEMA. This lake, this whole area was declared an irretrievable hazard last night. That means—

EARLENE

In know what it means.

*(softer)*

Damn.

LICIA

Everyone else in town's been evacuated. As of five minutes ago, this officially became a ghost town.

EARLENE

In the time it took to smoke a pipe.

LICIA

It's been coming for a long time.

EARLENE

Don't I know it. The bugs are gone. They used to slick my windshield. Last summer, during the heat wave? A pelican dropped from the sky. The state bird, DOA. Never seen anything like it. "Don't worry," they said. And now what? Where are we supposed to run to?

LICIA

The administration's going to work with the refinery to buy everyone out. It'll be enough to start over. Somewhere better. In a place that's sustainable. With green architecture.

EARLENE

I'm not talking about buildings. I'm talking about the heart of us. Where's that supposed to relocate?

LICIA

I'm so sorry. If we'd done our jobs sooner—

*Licia holds out her hand. Earlene advances.*

EARLENE

You mean back in the 70s? Or the 20s when Union Carbide and Carbon birthed the Carbide and Chemicals Corporation?

LICIA

You know?

EARLENE

Everybody round here knows. Looks like you're the ones slow on the uptake.

LICIA

Maybe, when this is over, we can find a way to work together.

*Licia extends Earlene a clipboard.*

LICIA

But first, let's get you to safety. Just sign at the x.

EARLENE

*(reads)*

What about our personal belongings? I've been holding things for my son and his kids.

LICIA

I'm sure your insurance—

EARLENE

Insurance stopped covering us years ago.

LICIA

Oh.

EARLENE

Can you give me a personal guarantee? In writing.

LICIA

No.

EARLENE

Hmmm. Then maybe I'll take my chances.

LICIA

You can't. Not with this storm. It's stirring up things you don't want to meet. Trust me. I'm a post-doc in emergency management. I'm here to study the site. But I'm committed to making sure people here get taken care of.

*(beat)*

A post-doc means—

EARLENE

I grew up here, but worked admin at Chicago State till I retired. I understand all about fish and post-docs, ground soil and promises.

LICIA

It's personal for me, too. I'm Penny's girl. Penny Corkle—

EARLENE

The school cafeteria. She still with us?

LICIA

Passed.

EARLENE

Cancer?

*Licia nods.*

EARLENE

Explains a lot. Condolences. Know your people. They didn't deserve. That said Miss Licia, there's a difference between being from a place and of a place.

LICIA

You left. Came back.

EARLENE

I took these hallows and swamps with me. They called me back. Doesn't feel like this place is inside you the same way.

LICIA

That doesn't make my commitment less real.

EARLENE

Guess we'll find out.

LICIA

This storm's bad. There's something malignant about it. Best case scenario, it unleashes bad things for a long time to come. I've got a towel and dry clothes in the car.

EARLENE

Me and the fish and crawdads? We're good. You go 'head on.

LICIA

At least come out of that water.

EARLENE

I'm good where I'm at. Look at how they're lighting around me. We've made our own little shoal here every Friday since I got back. This is my happy place and my safety. It won't betray me.

LICIA

Shoals aren't stable in a cat six.

EARLENE

You're thinking 'bout sandbank shoals. This kind's where fish and other creatures move together. Each one on their own rhythm. Their light'll let me know what's up.

LICIA

The light that comes from those fish isn't what it used to be. It comes from chemicals now. Toxic chemicals.

EARLENE

Some of their light still comes from joy. That's the part that's safe to eat. I can tell the difference.

LICIA

How?

EARLENE

Just do.

LICIA

You might feel okay, but the poison's building in your body.

EARLENE

Air was already bad. Make sense the water would follow.

*A siren sounds.*

EARLENE

*(lightly)*

That last call? I'll take a margarita.

LICIA

No one's coming back for you. The rest of my team's gone.

EARLENE

But you came.

LICIA

Some kid told me you'd be out here. I'm not going to lie. I didn't believe him. But he kept tugging on my pants leg. Rich? Ricky?

EARLENE

Little Ricky Pontcharian. He's another one.

LICIA

Another one what?

EARLENE

Another of this place. Shoot, it might've been your mama talking through him to you.

LICIA

The dead don't speak.

EARLENE

The dead never shut up. Teasing us. Warning us. They just don't speak directly to folks who won't listen.

LICIA

I'm counting to ten—

EARLENE

Ha! That didn't work on me when I was seven. Damn sure won't work now. What else you got?

*Licia walks away.*

EARLENE

That it? You just gon' run off?

LICIA

I fight through science. I'm not throwing my life away in some overgrown pond. You want to stay. You're welcome to it.

*Licia tosses Earlene a Sharpie.*

LICIA

Write your Social on your arm so they can identify the body.

EARLENE

Handy trick. Will do.

LICIA

You don't make any sense.

EARLENE

I make more sense than you do. I'm willing to stay and fight for this place.



LICIA

There's nothing left to fight for.

EARLENE

Says who? What good's your science if you don't have the guts to fight for what it shows?

*Another, more urgent siren.*

EARLENE

Says them? Where've they been hanging all this time? While everything was going bad.

LICIA

The past is past.

EARLENE

The past is now. The past's the future. You dig deep enough anywhere round here, you find fossils. That's the dead living with us. That dead pelican gave its life to warn us about the heat. We've got responsibilities to the dead and we owe the past more than another scientific study, 'specially one telling us what we already know.

*A crack of thunder.*

EARLENE

See? That's the earth fighting back. She's fighting back! And she'll win. We need her. She doesn't need us. Stand with me.

LICIA

And die?

EARLENE

Fight. As god is my witness, during the last storm I stayed under for two hours. The fish gave me air.

LICIA

Impossible.

EARLENE

You study things. I gut know them. That's the difference. It's too late to run now anyhow. Time to hunker down.

*The rain begins. Earlene holds out her arms. Licia wades into the water.*

LICIA

We might not survive this.

EARLENE

Then we bear witness from beyond. This ain't N'awlins, but laissez les bon temps rouler.

*(howls to the storm)*

Let the good times roll, baby.

LICIA

Oui cher. Oui.

*Earlene, then Licia, submerge themselves in the lake as the storm hits.*

*FADE TO BLACK.*

*The sounds pass. Earlene and Licia take a sharp, deep breath. The sound of television news anchors reporting the devastation.*

THE END



MILDRED INEZ LEWIS writes and directs for theater, film, and the digital space. A Dramatists Guild member, she is part of Central Works, Ensemble Studio Theatre-LA, PlayGround-LA, and Towne Street Theatre. Mildred recently joined the Rogue Artists Ensemble as an associate artist. She is part of The Road Theatre's Under Construction 4 to write *WE, FOUR*, a new full-length play.

Current commissions include *JUKED*, an adaptation of Sophocles' *ELECTRA* for A Different Myth (Asheville, NC) and *FANTASMAS CROSSINGS* for the Lucille Lortel. Publications include *WE JUMP BROOM* for Smith & Kraus 2023 Best 10-Minute Play anthology. *THE GIFT* and */kom'plisit/* are published by Broadway Play Publishing.

The past can be haunting but so can the future, so can the unknown. Finding the people and places worth fighting for, those who can know you and support you in the ways we, as humans, so desperately need, can be a challenge. These stories, and the amazingly talented authors, screenwriters, and scriptwriters who wrote them, look to the past and to the future, through tragedy and humor, to capture the struggle for and necessity of community.

We hope they speak to you. We hope they inspire you to nurture your community as it nurtures you.

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