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Mythos

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mythos

by Sydney Cahill



To all those who seek solace in stories.

sea legs

take me back to the sheltered island
and the sailboat i first met on that august afternoon
when iridescent waves flowed like honey
and seagull colonies scattered like paper airplanes

take me back to my cautious introduction
when my juvenile fingertips clenched the sail's ropes and pulled them in tight
as i mustered up confidence from a deep sea of doubt
and watched the canvas inhale the air like growing wings

take me back to the intrepid adrenaline of letting the sails go
of watching the ivory sheets surrender to movement
as they entered a free fall of forward motion
i tried on fearlessness like a summer dress
a sovereign body gliding atop the sea
bounding like icarus towards the setting sun

i miss the quiet catharsis of flight
the gentle alchemy of kinetic equilibrium
of rearranging the sails like homemade curtains
and soaring far from discovery as mastery takes its root like dogwood
that first experience i can't relive but still replay
its muffled glow resounding as it spins like an old vinyl record

take me back to the ropeburns that stung my hands like sour candy
to the inimitable first voyage as ephemeral as footprints on sandy shores
to the sea salt and sweat that permeated the august air
to stepping off the dock then anchoring my feet in the dirt
and wondering why the sturdy ground
now felt so unsteady

this is not a eulogy

i once adored a princess whose
favorite flowers were forget-me-nots
perennial blue blossoms that she planted
in her garden to die every winter
and regrow in kensington's april sun

one evening august rain washed the garden away
and took her with it
the world stopped in silent grief
then broadcast their wistful gratitude and
mourned her faded crown

her requiem is sung with shiny gratitude
and memories that are dreamt, not sown
rome's hunter goddess was her eponym,
yet other people hunted her,
tore her apart then divinized her in young death

when we saw beauty, we confined it to vases
and watered it as we watch it wither away
now we canonize her kindness
as though it belongs to us,
painting her complexity in pastel shades

we fall in love with strangers
like we light fires in frigid air
and i took shelter in her fairytale,
warmed myself in her glowing flames

perhaps our hearts are better broken
perhaps our compassion is not arrogant
it is tragedy planting roots in our humanity
our hearts vowing to grow

maybe heaven blooms
in her kensington garden
where blue forget-me-nots wilt
then regrow in the spring

South for the Winter

Hope is the wooden staircase
where a small girl stands at the bottom,
takes a few cautious steps up,
turns, and prepares to fly.

*Hope is the girl with pink feathers**
that perches over the edge,
steadying her balance, gazing at
the small world below her.

Hope is tightening her feathered boa,
taking a deep breath,
standing on tiptoes,
then exhaling a slow
 one,
 two,
 three.

Hope is her boa swinging,
mouth laughing,
arms flailing,
feathers flying.

Hope is the crash. // *Hope is the crash.*

Of her luggage hitting the pavement
as she unloads the minivan,
a frenzy of flurried motions,
hope is her nervous heartbeat.

She has outgrown feathers,
that worn magenta accessory,
but her wings are of a different sort,
hope is a new beginning.

The world seems too big
and fearful, but she can't stay still

the seasons change, and so must she
hope is her swallowed smile.

She once delighted
in the discovery of pain,
now she stifles it like a sneeze,
hope is her mother crying.

She stands at the bottom of the dorm building's steps,
hands sweating,
feet shifting,
then exhaling a slow

three,
two,
one.

Hope is the wooden staircase.

**Line taken from Dzvinia Orlowsky's poem "Hope Was a Thing with Pink Feathers" from her book Bad Harvest as well as Emily Dickinson's poem, "Hope is the Thing with Feathers"*

November 3, 2020 4:59 p.m.

A Cover Letter for the Modern Professional (Available for \$3.99 on BusinessExpert.com)

Dear Sir/Madam,

I recently learned about this company through a friend (*Google search*) and was excited (*desperate*) to apply. I am excited by your company's mission (*starting salary*) and believe I am qualified (*underqualified*) for this position. Throughout my career (*pseudo-professional ventures*), I have acquired a stupendous multitude (*a couple*) of different jobs because of the strong flexibility of my interests (*the ever-changing needs of a capitalist society*). My past responsibilities (*chores*) include establishing relationships with third-party vendors in order to maintain managerial functions through intellectual stimulation (*getting coffee*), overseeing a complex administrative system for tracking projects and handling sensitive documents (*filing papers*), and verbally directing and managing incoming communication for institutional organization (*answering phones*). I am convinced (*unsure*) that this application will present a full (*one-dimensional*) presentation of myself and will catch your attention (*get discarded immediately upon arrival*) so that this process will showcase (*belittle*) who I really am. Once, I was Assistant Manager (*assistant to the Manager*) for my colleague's (*sister's*) animal care business (*walking the neighbor's dog*) early in my career (*when I was ten years old*). From my early experiences to now, I am a well-rounded (*novice*) candidate for this specific (*vague*) job description, and I want to explore a new opportunity (*climb the corporate ladder*). I believe (*question*) that I can apply my (*unrelated*) experience to this company because I would love to further its moral (*monetary*) aspirations and jumpstart my career (*stop myself from drowning in student debt*). I look forward to hearing from you (*will be sending twenty identical letters elsewhere*).

Sincerely,

Insert Your Name Here

November 25, 2020 3:21 p.m.

A Tasteful Rejection Template to Placate Rejectees and Maintain a Respectable Company Culture (Available for \$4.98 from BecomeaBoss.com)

Dear Rejected Applicant,

Thank you very much for taking the time (*for burdening us*) with your application (*solicitation*). This application process has been competitive (*overwhelming*) and we thoroughly read (*spent 30 seconds on*) each of our applicants' materials. We particularly appreciated (*vaguely remember*) your skills and abilities (*your abstruse paperwork*) and were very impressed (*neutral*) about your accomplishments (*your "Employee of the Month" award from a summer job twenty years ago*). Due to a large (*uncontrollable*) number of very talented (*overqualified*) applicants, we are unable

to offer (*give*) you a role (*salary*) in our company. Instead, we decided to move forward with another candidate (*we hired our CEO's cousin's friend's brother's sister's babysitter's second cousin's grandmother*). We think (*question*) you could be a good fit for other (*unlikely*) future openings and will reach out (*ignore you*) again if we find a good match. We hope (*doubt*) that you will consider (*forget*) our company again so that you may (*may not*) join the team (*get rejected once more*) and further our company's (*the CEO's company's*) mission statement of inspiring the world through our service and creating a better everyday life for people (*making money*). I am happy (*reluctant*) to answer your questions (*complaints*) if you would like any specific feedback (*justification*) about your application or interviews (*your rejected personhood*), and I hope that you will stay in touch (*move on*). Our company regrets that we cannot (*choose not to*) offer you a position because employment spots are limited (*because we are nearly bankrupt*) and because we are striving towards a close-knit company culture (*because we are cutting costs as much as possible*). We wish you luck in your job search (*your applications for jobs that are not at this company*), and we thank you for your interest in our company.

Regards,

Underpaid Human Resources Manager

Signed, Persephone

My suitcase overflows with the remnants of summer. A maple leaf, a wildflower. Grain, sunshine, a cardinal's feather. They will all turn to ash once the journey is over, but this ritual brings some mellow consolation.

The first tinge of orange appeared on an oak tree down the road. One of its leaves floated to the ground, and upon further inspection I had identified the early stages of apricot pigmentation. It's peculiar how autumn takes its time. Makes itself comfortable. Nestles itself, gently, like a serpent burrowed in the undergrowth. The crows call, the fog settles, the leaves crisp. Everything arrives, slowly. Autumn dies standing up.

As it does, I must depart. There's no choice in the matter. Treading upon arid soil, I walk through the barren field, heading towards the nervous blanket of mist that engulfs the horizon. Slowly, the trees become strangers. The sky becomes smoke. Without vision, without touch, I can still find my way along the path. I take no pride in this familiarity.

This is not a plea. I know the rules and have been obedient. Pomegranates once tasted sweet on my innocent tongue, yet now I starve, swallowing my words before I speak them. I become cold in order to match the air that estranges me. These are the conditions of imprisonment. The punishment for a woman who once dared to ask for too much.

I feel the dry air wrought with catastrophe as I go back to him. Him, who gave me a crown. Who gave me a title. So polite in his cruelty. So civil in his captivity. He shatters my spirit like glass then puts me back together so that I may sit on the throne he created for me. He calls me beautiful as his breath whittles my bones down to ashen straw. I do not know winter, but it cannot be more frigid than he is. I try to console myself with the hope of springtime, but absinthe cannot go down like honey, no matter how small the sips.

As I get closer to my destination, I feel death wrapping around me like a worn scarf. Like a knitted tourniquet. Like an artful serpent. But before I succumb to my annual fate, I decide to stop and bury this note in the soil. Perhaps someone will find it. Perhaps not. Regardless, I will leave something behind this time. Something to excavate. A reminder. A promise.

This is not a plea. I know the rules. I know them, but I resist them, even as my skin turns pale and my bones grow weak. This time, I do not acquiesce to my demise. It arrives, slowly, and I do not step forward, I wait. I withstand. I pray. I write. I endure. I die standing up.

The Understudy

Piper Marie Clark looked both ways before taking a step to cross the fluorescent hallway leading to the front door of the auditorium. It was an unnecessary precaution, given the fact that she had deliberately been the first student to arrive at the school building, but she wasn't about to take any risks in her escapade.

Even before she trudged her purple rain boots all the way to the entrance of the theater, Piper could see the white sheet of paper sitting atop the wooden double doors like freshly fallen snow. Once she approached the sacred document, Piper stopped to take a deep breath and close her eyes. She then clicked her heels three times, a superstitious habit she had developed from repeated viewings of *The Wizard of Oz*, then opened her eyes back up to focus them on the neatly formatted text laid out in front of her.

Immediately, Piper's attention gravitated towards the large font that read "Cast List" at the top of the page. She searched for her own name, her sightline snaking downwards as she skimmed the columns of the names of each student and their corresponding role. Her eyes looked further down. Then, even more further down. Finally, Piper found her name at the very bottom of the list, the last name in the long column. Beside her name, there was a second column where a corresponding character role had been printed neatly on the page.

Tree #3.

Piper huffed an indignant sigh and started down at her glossy rain boots. She didn't have time to relish in her anger before she heard another student begin approaching the auditorium from the school's main entrance, and she quickly tried to flee the scene, reasoning that her embarrassment would be better suffered in private.

No such luck. As soon as Piper turned around, she saw Maia Ashford prancing down the hall, who in turn saw Piper's beet red face and responded with a polite wave. Paralyzed, Piper stood in place and waved back, watching Maia get closer and closer until finally she stood in front of her, perusing the cast list in search of her own name. It didn't take her long to find it.

"I got the lead role!?" She announced in feigned humility.

"Congratulations." Piper muttered, still horrified.

"Who are you playing?" Maia asked nicely, her back still turned towards the Cast List as she scanned the names in search of Piper's.

"A tree." Piper responded, not even wanting to dignify the Tree with its corresponding number.

"Oh." Maia said.

“Yeah.”

“Looks like you’re also my Understudy.”

Maia stepped aside to reveal that, as a matter of fact, Piper’s name was printed in small font underneath Maia’s, with a small asterisk denoting her as her Understudy. Upon the revelation of this groundbreaking knowledge, Piper almost immediately began to stage her coup. *Objectives and Tactics*, she reminded herself. At least, that was what she had read in her Stanislavski *An Actor Prepares* book (a somewhat precocious pick for an eleven-year-old, but nevertheless).

Objective: Get the lead. *Potential Tactic Number One:* Ask for it. But how was she supposed to ask Maia outright? No, she’d have to be sneakier, more subtle. *Potential Tactic Number Two:* Bribe. Piper could try to barter, but she had nothing of value on hand, and Maia didn’t seem like the greedy type anyway. *Potential Tactic Number Three:* Guilt. Piper could start crying, though Maia wasn’t particularly known for her compassion. Piper had just finished this last thought when she noticed that Maia’s mouth had been moving and speaking directly to her.

“...I have to miss one of the performances, so as the Understudy, I guess you’re going on for me.”

Piper couldn’t hide the smile from spreading across her face as she processed the news. The lead role, for one night. Not exactly a full lead, but not *Tree #3* either.

“Well, I’ll see you at rehearsal tonight,” Maia called behind her as she left Piper standing alone at the door. Piper looked at the list again, clicked her heels three times in silent gratitude, then walked away, her rain boots squeaking on the tiled floor.



Sydney Cahill is currently a Junior at Providence College double majoring in Theatre and English. She was born and raised in New Providence, NJ, though now splits her time between New Jersey and the North Fork of Long Island. She fell in love with writing at a young age and hopes to become a playwright, continuing to form connections with people through storytelling.

“Sydney Cahill's works are beautifully written. Her flawless imagery and intelligent vocabulary make for excellent poetry and intriguing stories. Miss Cahill executes her writing with grace that shines through in each piece. I absolutely love her style!" - Maeve Conway

“Sydney’s ability to have the readers emotions at the tip of her palm is truly special. Her imagery and description is so well meticulously placed, it puts a smile on any reader's face! A must read in 2020! -Thomas Zinzarella