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# Best Forgotten

by Julianne Lepp

Thought I would go ache there for a  
while

    somewhere between the concrete  
sidewalk lines of my childhood.

Thought I would go shake there for a  
while

    inside the raw feel of flesh to  
fingers.

How far away that spoke to memories  
made to linger lonely

unremembered

Now fresh to the knowing and  
white knuckles to my fist.

## The Rootless Ones

by David Rask Behling

We are born in towns where we  
do not live long enough to remember anything. We  
move into new houses. We  
start over in new schools. We  
try to understand sexuality while we  
sit next to strangers in desks and pews. We  
play with and then date kids whose names we  
cannot remember two months later. We  
move again. And again. And again. We  
give up on friendship. On dating. On long term anything. We  
read books because we  
find good books in every library. We  
hate all of it: endless moving, new schools, new relationships. We  
grow up not understanding what *home* means. We  
don't believe people who say they  
can make a *home* anywhere.



**It's culture if it wears a crown**

by Charles Payseur

## Selkie Rules Apply

by Charles Payseur

“That’s it, I think,” Pat says, closing the back of the moving truck.

“Not quite,” Gryph says, appearing from the tree line that abuts their former home.

“Forget something?”

Gryph smiles broadly beneath his beard.

“Just one last thing we need.”

He motions into the woods, a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

Pat sighs but follows. He’s been longing for and dreading this day. A real job in his field after a decade bouncing around remote temp work. A dream opportunity, if two thousand miles away. But...

“Look, I know this can’t be easy,” Pat says.

Gryph waves his hand. Ever since Pat got the offer, he’s been fully supportive. Up to and including selling his family’s house in the woods. A house Pat knows he loves.

“It’s just a place.”

They stop at the edge of a small lake. The place where they first met. Pat smiles, remembering.

The taste of stale beer threatening to burble up his throat as he and his friends skulked between the trees, looking to skinny dip. Of course, only Pat had managed to strip before the bear appeared.

In the moonlight it seemed like a part of the earth, a shadow that grew up and up, sleek and powerfully muscled. It towered over him and he froze, caught between terror and awe.

His friends ran, of course. The last thing you wanted to do with a bear but instead of chasing them it was like their flight broke a spell, and the bear had simply turned and trundled off. And Pat had finally tried to run only to trip on his mostly-removed pants and cut his arm open on a jagged tree stump.

Alone in the dark, he called out, and then a new shadow through the trees. A part of him had hoped it was the bear. But it had been Gryph, there to help.

He's brought back to the present as Gryph unearths a chest from the ground, barely covered with dirt but cleverly concealed. Gryph opens it, revealing...

“Oh, you couldn't!”

Pat recoils. Inside, a gorgeous bear skin.

“You killed—”

But Gryph is sliding the skin on like a jacket and... growing. Taller and taller, the skin becoming a part of him until it's not a man but a bear standing in front of him.

Pat imagines he looks like a fish suddenly removed from water.

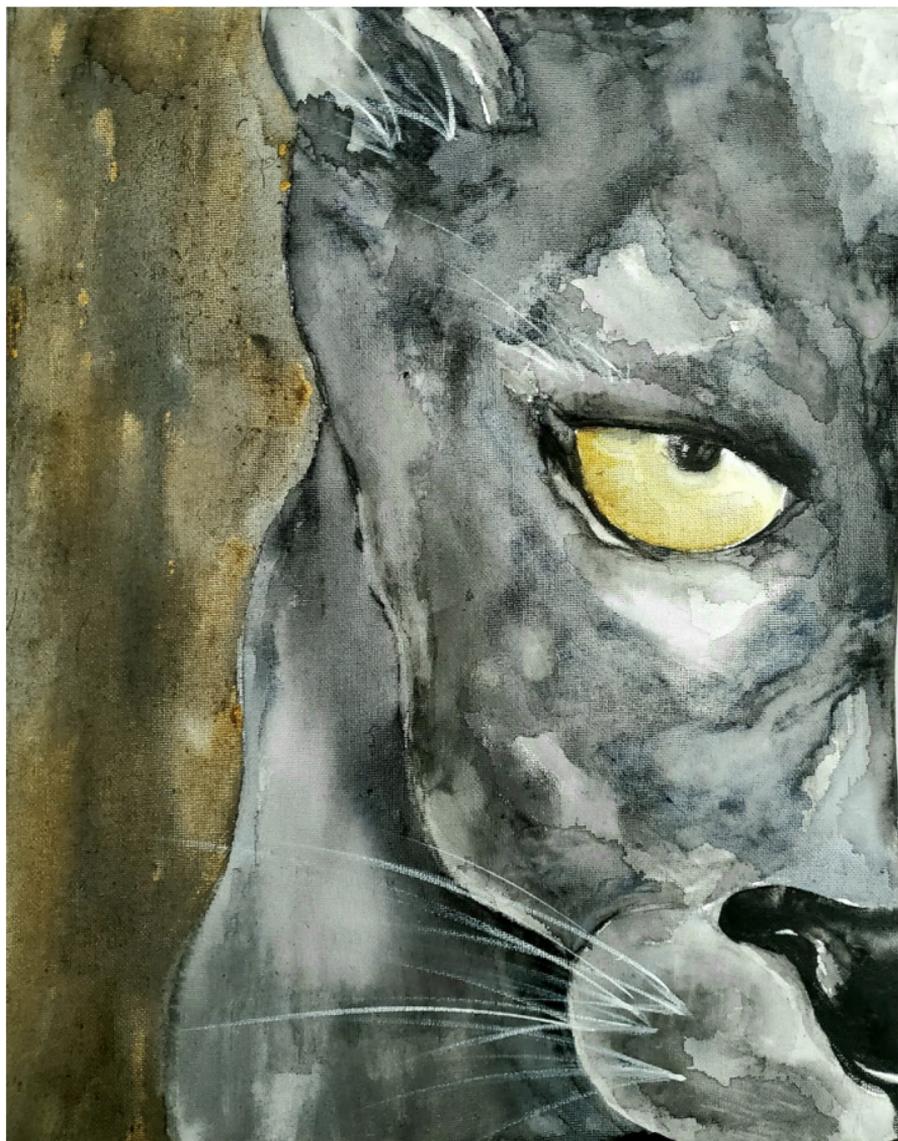
Then the bear is shrinking back and Gryph is there, holding out the skin

“From the moment I saw you I knew I would follow you anywhere. This place might hold the memories of my time here and my family’s time before that. But my home... is wherever my skin is. And I want that to be with you.”

Pat hides his sudden tears by burying his face in the bear skin, which is warm, and smells just like Gryph.

“You know a ring would have been fine,” Pat says through the tears.

Then Gryph is kissing him, and everything else is joy.





**The Queen** by Leah Greenwood

## Names on Cardboard Cups

by G. V.

Jack looked up as his name was called, caught sight of the barista, and tore his gaze away before their eyes could meet. Damn! It was the hot guy behind the counter again today, the one you could tell had a roguish smile beneath his mask by the way his eyes glittered.

He called Jack's name again. The air in the coffee shop had been pleasantly warm when Jack had entered, but now it felt too warm. The delicious aromas swirling through the place were overwhelming. The honey-golden midmorning light trickling through the windows, previously soothing, seemed to be laughing at him. Jack knew he shouldn't be embarrassed. And yet...

Face flushing, he forced one foot in front of the other. There had never been a longer room to cross than this one in the little coffee shop. He reached out for the cup. Even the paper sleeve around it was too hot.

"Jack," said the barista, and it didn't sound awkward coming from him at all, didn't sound like he'd called a dozen different names before. It was natural. "So this is it, then?"

"Uh, yeah, that's what I ordered," mumbled Jack. He risked a glance at the barista, cheeks growing hotter when he saw how those brown eyes danced at him. He hoped he wasn't a joke. The last thing Jack wanted was for this guy to be laughing at him.

“That’s not what I meant.” The barista leaned in, but Jack was too frozen to move. “Last three times you’ve been here, you used Jack.”

So he’d noticed. Of course he’d noticed. Jack had been fooling himself, pretending no one would notice. It was supposed to have been a low-stakes way to figure out what really clicked for him, something suggested by a friend. Make a list of all the names you like. Order a coffee and give a different name each time. When you hear it called, you’ll know if it fits. Jack had been giving this name out the most, trying to avoid the next name on his list—Donald, after his late grandfather—but it wasn’t until that instant he knew for sure.

“Yeah,” he said. He forced himself to breathe. He braced himself to get laughed at, mocked. “It’s Jack. My name’s Jack.”

“Fucking finally,” said the barista. He grabbed a stiff paper napkin from a stack to his right and yanked the cap off the permanent pen. “I’ve been waiting forever to give you my number. Wanted to get your name right in my phone.”

Suddenly Jack couldn’t do anything but stare at the guy.

“I...what...are you asking me out?” He swallowed hard. His heart was doing stop-starts in his chest. His eyes found the barista’s name tag: Aaron. Why had he never looked before?

“If you don’t text me, I’ll assume that’s a no,” said Aaron. He held the napkin out.

Jack didn’t hesitate. He took it.

## A SOUL FOR LIBERTY.

by T. Mwelase

*The scrunched nose and rosy face,  
The grimace from pain,  
Not forgetting the screams of torment,  
And the satisfaction it all brought,  
As I forced the edge tool down his chest,  
To his dark and twisted heart.  
Vividly, I remember it all.*

*Bounded by love and duty,  
Jesus was crucified on the cross,  
For the same rational motives,  
For my sister's sanity,  
Even I had to kill a monster.  
The only tenable sacrifice was his blood.  
The same way Christ's was.*

*Finally, the coffin collides with the ground.  
Thousand souls are finally unconstrained,  
From the toxic clutches of a pedophile .  
I rescued them from their worst nightmare,  
I refuse to see beyond that intellection.  
Even though I will forever grieve my psyche,  
Which along with him, died that night.*



**flowers & waves** by Dirt Riot

## **Ghost Story**

by Cheyenne Nardin

The third step from the bottom always creaks when stepped on. Once a nuisance, but not now. Now I crave the sound. It's part of our routine. I step, the creak a sharp staccato, and pause to see if this will be the day it falls on deaf ears.

But Marianne glances up, only a fleeting moment before her gaze returns to her crossword. A smile curls her weathered lips. "I know you're there," she whispers, her trembling fingers clutching her pen, etching a letter into an open space. When I near her, she cinches her robe tighter.

I like to let her know I'm there.

I stay close throughout the day. When she rises, moving to the kitchen, I linger near her as she shuffles, as if I could catch her if she fell. Old habits. The procession down the hall evokes flashes of our wedding day. Our first one, anyway. Slow steps down the aisle, my arm linked through hers. Our second wedding had been merely a trip to the courthouse once it had been made legal, decades later. She had pointed at my hair, joking that we already had our something old, our something blue. I replied that with her hair, we had no need for white dresses. But when that day came, she was as radiant as she'd always been, and we still kissed as if it were our first.

These days I can only watch her, following our daily routine. There are two moments I cling to, two moments that I know she feels my presence: the creak in the morning, and my kiss good night. The same kiss I placed on her forehead every night for the past fifty years. Even now, she graces me with a smile before drifting to sleep.

Time slows on the day I step on the third step from the bottom and Marianne does not look up. Only when she fills in the last letter of her crossword does she realize something is amiss. Her mouth turns downward. I know what she is thinking, not that her hearing had finally left her but that I had. I'm still here, I want to shout. I would never leave you.

The days that follow are harder. I still linger; I still follow our routine. I still had our goodnight kiss.

One night I watch her breathing slow, her chest rise and fall, until it stops altogether. I place a hand on her cheek, and she does not wake.

“Amelia?”

I turn to see her standing next to me, both of our gazes flitting from the Marianne on the bed to each other. Finally, finally, her eyes lock on mine, like a return home after years of exile. A grin spreads across her cheeks, and it is glorious. Radiant. She reaches for me, and I her, and she can feel my touch once more. Not as a chill, but as light. And my voice—

“I'm here,” I say. “I always have been.”







The Zine will return next year, and we hope you consider submitting your fiction, nonfiction, poetry, or art! Updates and news can be found at [cvlgbt.org/library](http://cvlgbt.org/library) or email questions, queries, or submissions to [library@cvlgbt.org](mailto:library@cvlgbt.org).