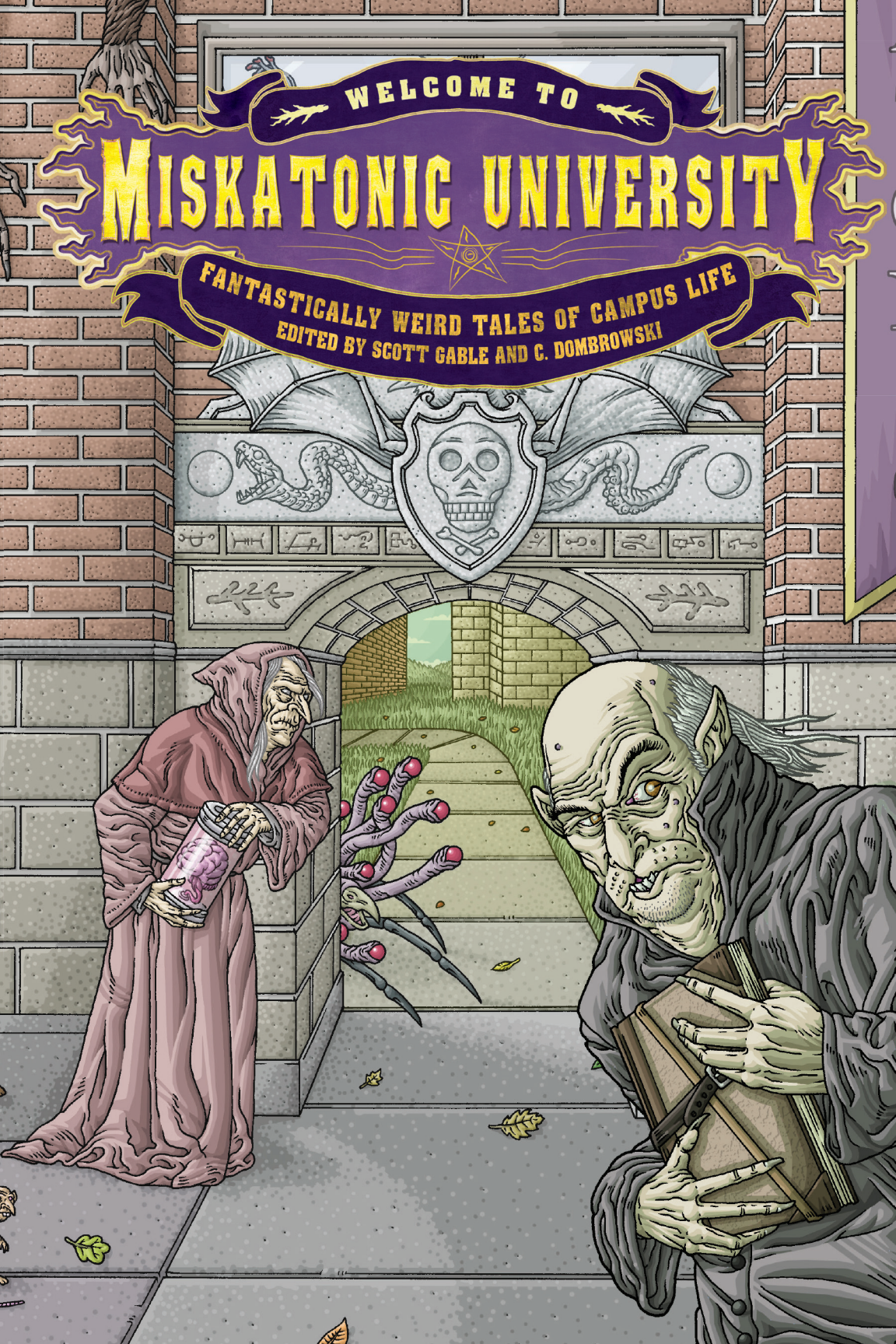


WELCOME TO

# MISKATONIC UNIVERSITY

FANTASTICALLY WEIRD TALES OF CAMPUS LIFE  
EDITED BY SCOTT GABLE AND C. DOMBROWSKI



# MISKATONIC UNIVERSITY



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FANTASTICALLY WEIRD TALES OF CAMPUS LIFE

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# Introduction

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*Scott Gable*

 MISKATONIC UNIVERSITY.

*These storied halls. And unending possibilities. This is a place of both proven tradition and wide-eyed speculation. This is a place where one's intention and perseverance blossom in the face of collaboration and control, where inspiration and discovery are honed by the deliberation of peers, where students devour knowledge and barter in experience, all to shape a new tomorrow. This hallowed institution stands as a bulwark against the darkness of ignorance and the tyranny of fear, individuals collected together with minds wide open to the unknown, safeguarding against that which would harm while accommodating that which enriches.*

*Nestled in the beautiful Arkham Valley (and scattered around the world in satellite campuses and isolated research stations), Miskatonic University presents truly unique learning opportunities. Every year, the university attracts students hailing from all over the globe, seeking to avail themselves of our cutting-edge research driven by professors and graduate students at the top of their fields.*



Good old Miskatonic—ol' Misk, MU, "that place." Few institutions have adapted quite so well. But then, when you're a magnet for the weird, you won't last long if you can't adapt. In the face of its many and varied challenges, this place

has grown into a strange brew of both deep-seated tradition and progressive attitudes.

These are tales of Miskatonic University today. What might Miskatonic look like if it existed right now? What might student life be like? These tales combine college life with the strange, mixing the thrill of the unknown with the titillation of the occult. Of course, there's beer, sex, and parties; study groups and all-night cramming; campus activism and impassioned discourse; vital research and faculty struggling for tenure. But also, you know, magic and monsters and psychedelic oddities.

What avenues of study might such a university sanction, either publicly or privately? Where are they getting so much funding? This university's been around the block—seen a thing or two!—and they're at the bleeding edge in certain realms of research. Occult studies have seeped, seemingly innocuously, into various branches of nearly all academic departments and inform everything from quantum physics to computer science, sociology to modern American literature. Its library studies program is simply hands down the best, most advanced in the world, likely one of the most well-funded of sectors at the institution with ever-evolving safeguards and best practices.

But there's bound to be lingering effects from all the occult activity. People disappear all the time; sometimes they even come back. Entire wings are off limits to humans indefinitely. As a whole, this anthology is about the angst and drama of college life, the promise of big occult ideas, and the dread (and the hopeful, headfirst exploration) of the unknown, of the forbidden. And some well-placed dark humor.

These are stories with modern sensibilities. We're presenting a living, breathing MU. Sure, people die, just as new faculty are hired and new students fill empty seats. Buildings crumble or disappear into wormholes, but there is always new construction. Monsters come and go, sometimes with fanfare and sometimes not; some even stick around as lab specimens, secret pets, or disguised as faculty.

But above all, the university persists.






# Some Muses Are Not Gentle

---



*Brandon O'Brien*

*When, long ago, the Goddesses carved Earth,  
In complex forms, they shaped out Man at birth,  
And beings of ev'ry part were then designed;  
Yet lower down, a space left undefined,  
A gap still hollow, underneath the plan  
that our fair Mothers filled—with lesser man!  
They made a child, then turned Hatred's spigot  
O'er its lips, and called its drinker "Bigot"*



—Anonymous, graffiti on office door  
in Miskatonic Literature Dept., 2011

DARRYL STRAIGHTENED UP, LIFTING HIS HEAD OFF THE FLOOR OF HIS apartment and holding his temples. Aside from the headache, he felt a pain in his thigh. He squinted in the dark to find the source and saw not much of anything. By his hands on the floor, he felt sheets of paper rustle and shift, dozens of them dragging against their own faces. The sound of his phone vibrating was what woke him. He felt the reverb of it against the ground beneath him. When he passed his hands over the floor, all he found were more sheets. More and more until his eyes finally grew accustomed, and he could see it trembling against the floor. He brought it to his ear with a yawn.

"Hello?"

“Darryl, where are you?”

He cleared his throat. “Noelle?”

“Yeah. Noelle. The same Noelle you promised to go on a double-date with this evening? What happened?”

He sighed. “Shit. I was . . . I still have this manuscript for Poetry, and I thought I’d crack out something that came to mind before I left, and the next thing I kn—”

“Goddammit, Darryl. You mean to say you couldn’t stop being such a pained artist for one night?”

“But Noe, I swear, I just needed to—”

“Wait.” In the beat before Noelle continued, Darryl could sense their frustration. “I asked you to stop calling me that.”

“Sorry . . . I—” Darryl shifted, and only then did he notice the searing pain in his thigh. He placed his palm against his leg, and the pain grew as his fingertips found it. A whole wooden pencil. Piercing his skin all the way through. He didn’t even know that he had a pencil this long—maybe nine inches, in one portion of muscle and out the other end, just under the bone. Hell, he didn’t even write with these. His preferred weapon was still on his bed: a point-three-millimeter drafting pencil with its clip glinting in the faint lights outside the window. He pulled the wooden one out of him, wincing into the phone.

“Darryl? Are you okay?”

After another few seconds of pain, he glanced at it, red glistening against the yellow and light brown. “Yeah, I’m good.” He took a breath. This was new. The blackouts he could deal with since the dream—he figured it was overwork, a kind of thing he’d eventually recover from. But . . . the more he thought about it . . . the nearest wooden pencil was unsharpened in a box on the other end of the room.

“You sure? Because if you’re okay, I’m fucking mad at you.” Noelle chuckled.

“I meant to come, Noelle. I’ll make it up to you and Colleen and Will soon. I promise. How are they though?”

“They’re good. Colleen says she misses you during their D&D sessions. Also I brought back some pineapple chicken, okay?”

“You ain’t—” He caught the creole before the sentence finished. “You don’t have to do all that.”

“I figured, since you insist on working so hard and never eating if I don’t make you anyway, I might as well.”



“Thank you.”

“I’ll talk to you later, okay? Love you.”

“I love you too, Noelle.”

The phone let out the faintest of beeps to signal the end of the call, and he tossed it behind him onto his bed. He put the pencil down against the small puddle of papers, and his eyes caught the first words of a sheet beneath his hand. He snatched it up by the corner and brought it to his face to get a better look.

everything is marble  
inside here,  
each mold glares at me  
like they expect me to rob them,  
lift them at the waist,  
leave with them over my shoulders.  
they think I came for them,  
to study their every joint  
and mock their masters.  
but they’re barely infants.  
they don’t know what these hands  
have made.  
they still can’t find their own  
throats, they just linger,  
scarecrows for imagination,  
trying to cast off pests  
like me.  
they can’t catch me.  
didn’t their fathers think  
I’d notice? how I  
grew up in a garden that moves, dances with the breeze,  
talks for itself?  
my obsidian brings music with it  
and will dance ahead of  
any legacy behind it, will  
duck blades, will step handsome,  
will not let you lock its feet.

He read it once and again, making sure of each line, studying it as if it were a reading from class. And was it? It was in his hand, written in pencil rough and panicked like so many others. But . . .

“When did I write this?” he muttered.

He reached back for the bloody pencil and squinted at the poem again for a few more moments before making a scribble in the bottom of the page: *following the theme of decentering Masters-Witt’s style and tone from her racist and homophobic undertones, this piece exists as almost a public challenge to the poet, a callout after works such as “Columbia Lost” and “Noble Men Drowning in the Street” . . .*

He took a handful of photos of it, and two others, and sent them to Elaine from his Creative Writing class with the caption *tell me what u think about these?* He got a reply almost instantly: *sure thing, man. you’ve been going crazy with the words lately.* He put the paper and the pencil down and sighed at the sight of the rest of the sheets.

“In the morning,” he muttered, crawling up into bed with a painful grimace.



In the morning, there was no more wound in his left leg. He almost didn’t notice until he went to take a shower. He wasn’t sure if it was one of those dreams again, under the glooming shape of Heaven, staring up at the approving gods as they spared a muse for him.

Eleanora Lily Masters-Witt. Of course. The white woman with the darkest heart that the early 1900s had ever known. What other poet to supervise the work of an Afro-Trini college student in the States?

He placed his hand on the space where the wound would have been, sliding his fingertips over the skin of it. Nothing. No lingering sensation of pain, not even a tenderness.

He still stared at it when Noelle entered the room. They were still putting away papers strewn across the bedroom. “Hey, babe,” they whispered, “how you feeling?”

Darryl frowned. Drowsiness opened the door for some of his island voice to slip through for one moment. “Okay? I ain’t know I shoulda be feeling some other type o’ way.”

Noelle shrugged in reply. “I swear, you sounded like you were in pain last night. But anyway.” They fell onto the bed with a pleasant sigh, grinning at him. “You wanna go out today?”

“Hmm?”

“Neither of us have class right away. And I haven’t seen you in how many days? I wanted to go out and spend some time with you. Please?”

“Yeah. I can do that. Where do you wanna go? There was this really nice bistro you mentioned before . . . Baroque, you said the name was?”

Noelle nodded. “Yep. I promise you’ll love it.”

“It’s easy for me to love someplace—they just need to have good cake.”

Noelle drove, grinning the whole way. They had been talking about the place since forever and talking about going out more often since the days before Darryl’s project consumed his attention. They’d go on about the flakiness of the pastries and the sweet softness of the cakes. Darryl replied with a chuckle. “You don’t have to sell me on it, hon. I’m looking forward to it already.”

Noelle made all the orders: cheesecake and grilled sandwiches and chocolate raspberry-flavored coffee, still raving about each plate and cup. They smirked, watching Darryl enjoy each single morsel in silence, and then they thought to ask a question: “You mind if I hear one of the pieces you’re working on?”

“ . . . hear?”

“Yeah? I mean, I know published poetry is a completely different atmosphere from spoken word, but I figured it’d still be better to hear it the way you want it read, y’know?”

“Um . . .” Darryl fidgeted. “Well, I didn’t bring any of it with me, so—”

They reached into their purse for several stacks of folded binder sheets, each one scribbled almost all over. “I’m sorry, I just figured—”

“No!”

They rolled their eyes. “I asked you not to call me that.”

“I mean *no*, the negative particle. Why did you—” He reached forward to grab them, but Noelle leaned back, frowning as they pulled their arms away. “Why did you bring those with you? And without my permission?”

“I’m sorry! I just . . . your writing is always . . . even when it goes over my head, it always sounds so grand and compelling and lovely. So I wanted to see what you were working on, but you’ve been so secretive about these . . .”

“Because . . . they’re not done yet. They’re all rough drafts.”

“Dozens of rough drafts? I must’ve picked up eighty pages off the floor!” They took a slow breath before handing the sheets over to him. “Okay. I really shouldn’t have. I’m sorry.”

He took them back with a slow sigh, folding them away in the pocket of his jeans. “I don’t feel good about sharing work until I know it’s absolutely ready, and none of this is. I . . . don’t feel like I got its intention right. For any of them.”

“And what’s the intention?”

He pursed his lips. “So I had, like, this idea? To try to channel the voice of Masters-Witt’s work while also writing poetry that deliberately challenges . . . everything else about her. She’s . . . quite a shit person, in her work and outside it. An N-word every other poem, no lie. So it’s about rejecting those parts of her politics while still being obviously after her.”

“Ohhhh. So like, *after* as in following and then *after* as in—”

“—yep. Work that comes for her. Corrects her. Takes her to task.”

“Oh, okay. And I take it you don’t think you’ve gotten there?”

Darryl shook his head, looking down. “I will. I’m close.”

Noelle smiled. “And I look forward to seeing you get there.”

Darryl beamed, lifting his head from the slice of cake before him—

Ahead of him, on the other side of the table, was no longer his lover but was replaced with the visage of a woman he had seen dozens of times on the dust jackets of the best lyrics with the worst themes. The woman glowered at him with a special cruelty, squinting at him and scowling like he were a stain.

When the woman opened her lips, no words came out, just a kind of unearthly screeching like in the other world where he dreamed her up. He could read her lips in the moments before it all became black: *you damned monkey, you think you can wield a pencil and stab me with it, but you can barely scratch a whole sente—*



On a white sandy beach, Darryl woke and found the heads of the great and terrible things of his dreams above him, gazing off into the dark of eternity. He felt the touch of fine dust beneath his fingers. It was dark, but it didn’t feel like the dark of the earth. It felt bright, amaranthine and august and lacking any delicacy. The gods were like moons; they drew his body up to them, torn

between the three and four and five of them as they continued with their own cosmic business.

And then Darryl noticed the shadow approaching him from the other end of the beach. It stepped toward where he lay, drifting to its right and stumbling awkwardly into the edge of the still sea. The night was somehow bright enough for him to make out the details of anything else around him, if there were much of anything. And yet, he couldn't tell anything of its body or its face or its clothes.

The shadow was feet away from his body, still straightening up against the sand. It seemed to want to say something, and he desperately wanted to hear what. Was this where he would get something new? Would it wash ashore for him, a brand new work from the gods themselves?

Or would it draw something long and dark and blurry from behind its back, continuing to make a drunken lurch toward him?



Darryl awoke with a start, gasping for breath. He thought he was holding his hands over his head, but really, he was pushing himself out of his bed with such force and swiftness that he almost propelled all the way backward, flipping a little out of the bedsheets, landing headfirst against the floor, his legs still dangling over the mattress. Noelle shrieked, running into the room, a slick kitchen knife in their right hand. "Oh my God, are you okay?"

"Yeah, it was just a . . ." He paused, trying to put together the events of the day. "What time is it?"

"It's, like, past two."

"Past two?" Darryl tried to straighten up but mostly ended up crawling away from the bed. "What happened to breakfast?"

Noelle's eyes widened. "What, you don't remember?"

"I remember going out. But I don't remember eating anything."

"That's because you didn't!" They put the knife down on a dresser far from the bed, staring at him with an intense worry. "I was gonna take you to the hospital, and then you started . . . talking."

"Talking?"

They nodded. "Yeah. In a language I don't know—as in, one I've never even heard before. After you had a nosebleed and blacked out. I mean, I checked

your pulse even—you didn't have one. But you were talking. Like, *to someone*. Asking questions, giving answers . . . getting upset . . . getting scared . . . and then you stopped."

Darryl leaned up against the nearby wall, scratching his head. "So you saw I had no pulse and decided to take me home? It sounds like you're describing a seizure—"

"But it wasn't! And I didn't know what to do. How do you explain that to an EMT? So I took you home. I know it wasn't the best idea, but I didn't have any ideas. I was freaking out, Dee. And then . . ."

" . . . then what?"

Noelle sighed before opening a drawer at Darryl's usual writing desk to reveal a fresh stack of paper. Not all binder sheets—some were printer pages, torn strips of napkin or fabric—but they all bore scribbles in his handwriting in blue and black from pens he could see in the tin waste bin on the other corner of the room, spent completely of their ink.

"Wait . . . those are new?"

"What the hell is happening, Darryl? Is this some kind of . . . guerrilla performance art piece about inspiration or some shit because, if it is, it isn't funny."

"No, Noe, it isn't—"

"Oh my God—"

"*Fuck*—Noelle, I ain't—I don't—" Darryl sighed. "I don't know what happened. I legit don't. Are you sure you checked my pulse properly? I mean, I'm here, and I'm fine, save for . . . that." He squinted at the sheets. More work. More to parse, to take apart, to polish until the collection came together. The gods smiled after all. But he tried to hide his delight under a thick mask of confusion and worry.

"Dee . . ." They took a ragged breath. "I am not exactly a person of faith. But this is fucking possession-type shit, and it isn't funny. I . . . don't get it. I've never seen anything like this from you. And I really don't think this is what being inspired is like. So you have to let me know. Is this a joke?"

"What? Why would I joke about something li—"

"Because if this isn't a joke, I'm worried about you."

Before Darryl could protest, Noelle was out the door. He brought his hands over his head and groaned, trying to piece together the description he had. Just like the other nights. But . . . the dream . . . the talking to himself . . . the dying? Those things were new.

He rushed to the desk and glanced at one of the poems. It was all still neat, still perfect—perhaps even more so than his writing would be when he was awake. He wrote fine against the lines of the page, so much so that Darryl had to squint at the words.

haunted by white stone,  
patient hunters at the edge  
of my history.  
in my eye-whites  
they write all the reasons  
why I'll fade like crumbs of earth:  
*Your body pales to my body of work;*  
*You are made of mud to my silver;*  
*I've undone more than you can do,*  
*Your mahogany is rotten, it*  
*Creaks under brilliance—*  
it waits to press its alabaster ankles  
against my neck in sleep.  
a waxen shadow lurking in  
the lines between justice and jealousy,  
hands cold as piles of slush,  
rushes at me, spits at my ink,  
puts its fountain pen down my throat  
to reach for youth.  
it would tear me morpheme by morpheme  
if it could. it tries anyway.  
no matter how many majesties are  
made from these fingers,  
the snow will chase me to bite them off  
and grin, polish its porcelain skin  
with the remainders.

And in the margin, even finer, were words he actually didn't write at all.  
*I hope you're prepared to run forever then.*





He overheard it in class two days later. Elaine was in the hospital. Most people didn't seem to know what happened, but Darryl couldn't dare believe the story of the few people who claimed to. "Tried to kill herself," one classmate said. "Her boyfriend said she was talking to herself one night, saying something about how 'writing wasn't worth seeing this every day' and leapt from the roof of LaValle Hall. Call it luck, call it the devil, call it a cruel sense o' humor—she fell in the dumpster, which took most of the fall. Another inch off and it would've sheared her head clean off, but . . . at least she's still here, y'know?"

In his ear, Eleanora still whispered. *The dumpster! Where the dirty little chinky-chonky deserves to be. Would you like to make it easier and meet her there?* He wanted to turn and curse the sound, but he could already sense the eyes of his class on him. "I hear y'all were close," another classmate goes. "That you guys'd trade critiques and stuff. Did she ever . . . seem troubled to you?"

That afternoon, he returned home and took a long, warm shower, trying to wash off the sensation of his newfound muse. Did she do something to Elaine? Reach across the star-space just to find those poems he had written and tear her mind apart for being so unfortunately born a woman of color? Is that what this was? Not a musing but a haunting?

Eleanora Lily Masters-Witt would come to him again in the edges of the bathroom mirror as he stepped out of the shower. Sharp teeth muttering spites that he couldn't even clearly hear, a loud snow crash ringing throughout his skull. He tried to remain awake throughout it, watch her in defiance as she cursed him, cursed the island he was born on, cursed his voice, cursed his shade. But the sound grated, tore at his awareness. It wasn't long again until he crashed, watching drowsily as his head fell toward the kitchen sink—

He saw the home of the gods again, still careless and grand, hovering over the gold and purple heavens. He saw the shadow, but it was less than a shadow now—it was Eleanora, pale and cruel, a scepter of verdigris in her left hand, its head in the shape of a blazing sun with eight spikes jutting out of its edge. Her hands were covered in blood. And she would not stop staring at him.

They lingered in that stare forever. After a while, Darryl started asking himself about her, trying to recall some deep biography of her. How did she become so cruel in the first place? What had happened in her life to be so full of joy for nature, so plump with passion for romance and family, and yet, in the same breath, find it easy to write poetry about men like him being viciously destroyed by the same heavens he was in awe of now? Even as a specter hovering

above his writing hand, could he even change her mind?

And then he blinked and was back in the bathroom, face down against the floor. When he gained focus, he noticed the blood. On his nose and lip and chin, streaks running along the tile. He straightened up in a panic, and it gained a wider context—he put them there. Each red line purposely built into letter-clays of word-bricks of stanza-walls as fine as a finger could afford; a simple sonnet curving from beneath the sink to the edge of the toilet.

I've laid foundations of ruddier  
stories than your own.  
In the sweet of their flesh I  
found my reason, and I carried  
on with their carrion, stored  
warm on my tongue.  
I painted murals of the forbidden  
future with the lives of handsomer  
mongrels than you; the lock  
on Wisdom's gate was picked  
with their dirty bones, and you  
dared stalk me in,  
facing the stars like you deserve them.  
Play with the sandcastles you're left  
with, hope to find a piece of glass  
in the loam for now—or else, hide, rest  
the darkness back upon your werewolf-bones;  
I am not as gracious as the gods,  
not as patient with desecrations  
so deep as your dung-skin.  
Put the symbols you have raided  
back on their stools, show some scrap of sense  
and dismember yourself on your own.  
Know the things that owe you knowledge:  
of stones, of monstrous mumbles,  
anything below the sight-line of grace.  
Don't lie at the altar of grandeur,  
don't claim dogs can earn silver honors.

Give me back my rejoinders  
and wait for my teeth.

His breath caught. He tried to calm himself, but his body wouldn't comply. It wasn't his voice. It was the other one's. Written to him, a threat from between two planes.

At this point, there was no doubt. Something more than just subtle inspiration was at work. Maybe those dream-gods, those visions he had of the world of creation, were real? *But that ain't makin' no sense*, he thought. *How I go get haunted so? Because of a poem?*

And besides, there was no time, right? He still had a critique session to prepare for. He'd have to sift through them all. Which was more important? Which would haunt him more terribly?

He straightened up and strutted to the bedroom, reaching for a pen and a steno pad from the bedside table, scribbling a note about *a poem that invades one's space and imposes upon the black reader*. He glared at the poem, slowly transcribing each letter of it, silently thanking the gods of the space beyond space that the thing stalking the corners of his mind still, in its own way, wanted him to at least pass his course.



"Noelle!"

Professor Price came huffing across the quad to meet them. A foot before them as they glanced at him in confusion, he doubled over to catch his breath. "Noelle? Where's . . . where's your boyfriend?"

Noelle's eyes widened. "He didn't come to class? I saw him on campus some hours ago, but I figured he was on his way—"

Professor Price slapped his thigh in frustration. "Talk to him, yeah? I get the whole, um, losing-a-classmate thing—I get that you gotta grieve—but grades aren't gonna put themselves on hold for that. We need to talk about his work."

Noelle frowned. "Is . . . something wrong with it?"

The professor straightened up and shook both of his hands in front of him. "What? No! They're brilliant even. Revolutionary. Viewing the legacy of one of our most beloved local poets through the lens of his own body, taking on this blood-curdling sense of language to embody the fear of being . . . you know,

enveloped by a history that isn't yours. He could get published if he was patient enough to actually edit. That's what we need to talk about. To actually shop his work in class. This is supposed to be a building space, goddammit. I don't have time for students who want to play diva. Tell him I need to see him whenever he's ready. Okay?"

Noelle nodded meekly as the professor shuffled away, still mildly wheezing for a stray wind to fill his lungs. Noelle reached for their phone and immediately dialed Darryl's number. It rang out to voicemail. "Dee? Dee, what the hell is wrong with you this week? I've been trying to get your attention all day, and now you're ducking classes too? This stopped being funny a while ago . . ."

In the back of their mind—or the center of their heart—they imagined that Darryl wouldn't have gone a whole day ignoring their thirteenth, fourteenth, fifteenth call. They had no idea what to do next. Who to call, what to say. *I think my boyfriend is being too inspired for his own good . . .*

They sighed and put their phone away. Maybe they'd be lucky enough to find him in his apartment, working, being responsible, only so distracted by the reams of poems floating around in his mind . . .



Darryl hatched from the sky, red like clay. He felt himself careen downward, downward, to the beach of his dimmest dreams and most honeyed nightmares. He looked up as he fell, up at the heaven of the terrible angels of every other dream, ignoring him, not even noticing his descent.

It is still sand against his back, but he struck the ground like falling onto a mattress. He straightened up almost immediately, the sand gentle and warm between his fingers. He gazed out to the water, dark and unreflective and forever into the horizon.

Darryl made to scream. The wind would not let him; the sound rang dull in his ears, as if he pressed his hands tightly against them and merely whispered the scream to himself.

He could hear another voice though. Clearly, even harshly, like a sharp scratch against the walls of thought. "You don't even know how to speak English. But you want to write. Your mother should have spared you the embarrassment of life—but then again, she's probably as feeble-minded as you."

He turned and saw her. A gown glowing as if stitched with light, feeling

warm against his cheeks even though she stood too far away to touch. Despite the acrimony in her voice, she came to Darryl like a saint, even like a mother, smiling warmly at him, her movements gentle. This scared him even more, raised the panic through his bones in a strong current. And yet, he couldn't find the will to move. He found himself deferring, in fact. Eleanora beckoned him, and even in his horror, he rose and approached. He closed his lips, swallowed, reverently nodded. Eleanora nodded in reply, wrapping her fingers softly around his throat.

"Who told you that you deserved this?" she whispered.

When she drowned him, she did it with his eyes to the dark and daunting heavens, watching the gnarled god-planets in apathetic orbit. One of them, it seemed, met his gaze, watched him panic and gargle. Even it wouldn't remain long enough to notice the life escape him.

And then Darryl hatched from the sky once again, descending in the same fear as before.

In it, he found dozens of poems. They hurried past him whole, like bricks of verse glancing him in the water. A fictional man died in each one, and each one resembled Darryl. They sounded handsome to Darryl, like something a publisher would print as a twelve-dollar chapbook. One of the men turned, facing Darryl's racing thoughts, as clear as if they drowned together. He asked, "Who the hell told you to put my whole business out here for the whole world to see? Huh?" Darryl couldn't hear his own answer, but it didn't matter. The man is an absent full stop in the last stanza of his own life before Darryl's first hollow word sounded.

And then Darryl hatched once more.

He ran, but Eleanora was always there. Never catching up with him so much as not letting him out of her sight. Her demeanor sank into clearer rage with each descent. "Why won't you fade away already, you broken little spade? Why do you keep staining this place?" she groaned near the ninth or the tenth or the eleventh time, grimacing to the night sky.

On his bed, still and dreaming it all, the two fresh puncture wounds in Darryl's arm made by his fountain pens bled onto the sheets. Adhering to the corners of torn pages scattered to his side, their words steeping in it.

The bedroom door shook with a violent knock. "Dee? Are you there?"

In the shimmering winds of his dreamworld, Darryl heard his lover perfectly, screaming to reach them. Still there was no sound.

“How many more poems do I have to write for you?!” Eleanora shrieked against the cold air, moments before the thirteenth or fourteenth time that Darryl died. And the next time he fell, he had an answer, however nervously he delivered it—this time in his own accent:

“You ain’t write one scratch of my poems. I write each one o’ them. They’re just about you.”

After the next death, a little braver, he adds: “And if I have t’ dead here a t’ousan’ times for each o’ yuh nasty, faux-deep emo shit, then you better drown me facin’ up—”

Despite herself, Eleanora never noticed in her rage that she obliged. She grimaced, disgusted by this black man’s gall to give her an order. And yet, three more times Darryl struggled under the gods’ feet and his lover’s fading, distant voice.

“You think you’re clever, boy?” Eleanora screamed. “Perhaps your fearlessness will end when you realize that you’re here forever!”

His eyes widened in the water, and he grinned, just before that night’s last breath. And Darryl hatched yet again, whispering just before his head hit the water.

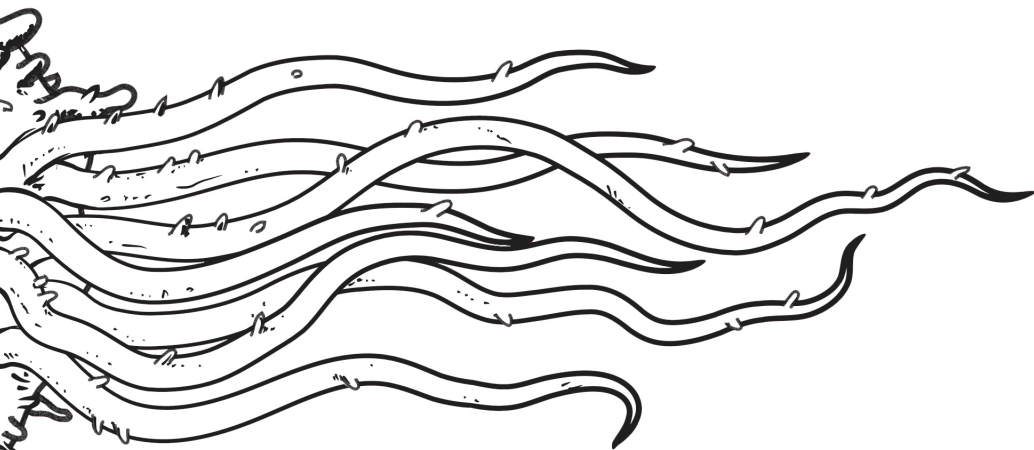
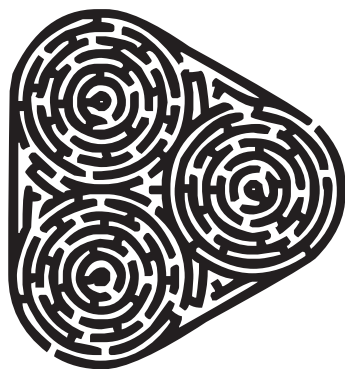
“Yeah, but I’s not the one *trapped* here.”

For but one slow moment, Eleanora paused. Once-flooding anger briefly stilled before rushing through her spirit again. Another drowning, another descent.

When another poem asks Darryl in the water—“Why?”—he points with a tremble upward, past the dim water, past Eleanora’s screaming face, past even the gods, to a world where even the poem knows how hard it is for men like them to live forever.

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**Brandon O’Brien** is a performance poet and writer from Trinidad. His work has been shortlisted for the 2014 Alice Yard Prize for Art Writing and the 2014 and 2015 Small Axe Literary Competitions and is published in *Uncanny Magazine*, *Strange Horizons*, *Reckoning*, and *New Worlds, Old Ways: Speculative Tales from the Caribbean*, among others. He is also the poetry editor of *FIYAH Literary Magazine*. He is also creating content at [www.patreon.com/therisingtithes](http://www.patreon.com/therisingtithes).







# Glory Night

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*Bennett North*

WHEN THE SCREAM SHATTERED THE MID-MORNING QUIET, BECKAH WAS IN the middle of guiltily deleting six of her mother's emails from her work account, unread. It took her a moment to process. There was only one thing that kind of a scream could herald, and it was pretty late in the semester for it.

Beckah opened her office door at the same time as Professor Peters down the hall. A few architectural design students who had crammed themselves into a hallway niche were looking up from their drawing boards in mild interest.

"New guy?" said Professor Peters with a smirk. Beckah shrugged and strode to the interior balcony railing, looking down.

In the classroom below, Drawing 101 was doing a final critique. Thirty students sat in a half-circle, staring at a handful of charcoal drawings pinned to the particleboard wall. One was still settling on the floor.

The office door at the corner of the classroom slammed shut. The class burst out in nervous titters. Professor Peters leaned over the railing next to Beckah and *tsked*.

"Who did it?" Peters called down. Faces turned up to them, and Beckah picked out the culprit before the students even started to point. It was an older student with a particularly *local* look about him. The overhead lights glimmered off the faintly bulbous dome of his eyes and the iridescent skin under his jaw.

Professor Peters stalked to the stairs. She was in her element, playing the



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***Repeat.***

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