

OUR ANTHOLOGIES

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20 enchanting queer stories set in magical coffee shops, tea houses, and cafes

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Queer fanworks inspired by Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing"

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He Bears the Cape of Stars

Companion anthologies with 34 total stories about and inspired by masquerades.

"She Wears..." is wlw, "He Bears..." is mlm

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Queer fanworks inspired by Alexander Dumas' "The Three Musketeers"

-coming to our website winter, 2023/24-

Aether Beyond the Binary

18 stories that blend science and magic, all with nonbinary main characters

-crowdfunding November, 2023-

WHO WE ARE

Duck Prints Press is an independent publisher that works with fancreators to put their original works into print. We primarily work with authors and artists, and we are particularly dedicated to working with queer authors and publishing stories featuring characters from across the LGBTQIA+ spectrum.

HOW TO PUBLISH WITH US

The best way to get involved is to apply for one of our anthologies that have an open call, of which we have several a year. Follow us on Tumblr [@duckprintspress](#) or [sign up for our newsletter](#) to be notified of the next one.

Our pitch process is a little different than traditional publishing querying—we ask for a paragraph summary of the story you intend to write and a sample of your best writing. This saves you the time of writing a story specific to a narrow theme only for it to be potentially rejected. We often invite authors to join our discord server even if they aren't accepted into the anthology, so you can be part of the community and ready for our next opportunity.

Many people have novels they want to publish, and we want to publish them! Once you're part of our community and have turned in a short story, met deadlines, and we've determined that our editing styles match, you can reach out and negotiate a plan for your novel.

HOW TO BUY OUR BOOKS

Print books are currently only available to backers of our crowdsourcing campaigns. We are hoping to offer print-on-demand services for our books by the end of 2023.

All our books and short stories are available as e-books in our web store. Anthologies, novellas, and novels are also available at Barnes & Noble, Kobo, Apple Books, Google Books, and other retailers.

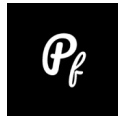
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FAQ

Are you only open to fanfiction authors?

Our vision—our goal—our *niche* in the huge world of publishing is that we work with fanfiction authors to publish their original works. If you don't write fanfiction, we're not the Press for you.

Do you take unsolicited manuscripts?

No, and if you send them, we'll be peeved. Repeat offenders may be banned from working with us.

How are authors paid?

Anthology contributors are paid a flat rate. Authors who publish stand-alone short stories, novellas, and novels with us are paid royalties on sales of the story. Our current royalty rate is 75% of net sales.

Do I need to be LGBTQIA+ to work with Duck Prints Press?

You need to be a creator to work with Duck Prints Press. That's the only requirement, because to have any more specific requirement could force people to out themselves and that's the last thing we want. Whoever you are, if you're interested with working with us and you meet our minimum requirements, you are welcome, so please consider applying to one of our anthologies next time we put out a call!

I don't write, but I love your press! How else can I get involved?

Many of our anthologies have illustrations, and for those we open artist applications. Once you're in as an artist, we're open to publishing art books, kickstarting pin sets or tarot decks, etc., provided making them is within our ability. If you aren't an artist, you can still follow us on social media, review us on Goodreads, write fanfiction of our novels, or drop us a DM. We'd love to hear from you!

MANY DROPS MAKE A STREAM

By Adrian Harley

Length: Novel

Rating: G

Genre: Fantasy, F/F (pre-relationship)

Tags: Action and adventure, heists, annoyances to pining allies, stand-alone book 1

Summary:

A memory-stealing cult.

The ever-watchful City of Eyes.

Making small talk.

Join Droplet as she faces all these horrors and more...

Vigilante shapeshifter Droplet has trained her entire life to take down those with more power than scruples, but she still makes mistakes. When a rescue mission goes wrong, a memory-stealing cult of blood mages escapes with kidnapped captives in tow. To save them, Droplet reluctantly teams up with the outgoing, tenacious Azera. Droplet knows better than to trust a human—she made that mistake once, and that person’s betrayal scattered her community across the known world—and she can tell Azera is hiding secrets behind her sunny smile. But if they can’t learn to work together, even Droplet’s own memories could be lost.



Chapter 1

If Droplet had believed Moss about how much time vigilantes spent waiting around for things to happen, she would have been much less eager to take up the mantle.

Droplet had been patrolling the docks of the city of Ninuthen for hours in the form of a seagrass owl—a local bird, and therefore inconspicuous. She carried a necklace of bones in her talons, but nothing else. Shapeshifters could travel light.

Ninuthen-proper glowed. Every street boasted lamps of light magic, and the wealthier businesses had sprung for glimmering murals that shone from their walls at all hours of the day and night. Nobody wanted to shower such extravagance on the dock

quarter, though. Perched in the shadows, Droplet marinated in an agonizing blend of boredom and tension.

When the deep bells of the dockside Sea Goddess temple pealed midnight, Droplet took off from a warehouse roof for another circuit. The smugglers she'd overheard in the tavern had not been obliging enough to say exactly which dock they were using. Nor when they planned to arrive.

Mice, rats, drunken brawl, more mice, a couple having an amorous encounter on a warehouse roof, more rats...there! Finally! Two cloaked, hooded figures pulling a large tarpaulin-covered cart between a couple of warehouses. One human and one raptor—she caught a glimpse of featherless hands from under one robe, and a feathery snout and long tail from beneath another.

Aside from the many tiny bones of her necklace clicking together, Droplet's midair turn was silent.

The two suspicious characters and their ungainly cart headed for a boatless dock filled with similarly suspicious tarpaulin-covered items. Far out on the bay, hard to spot even with owl eyes, a small ship approached despite furlled sails and no oars to be seen. They had a talented water mage on the way, then, at minimum. She would have to be quick. Bone sucked up cast magic like a sponge but could only take so much before it gave up, like a bucket of water against a wildfire.

Droplet flew to the end of the dock. The owl form had served its purpose. Time to shift.

In the first instant of the change, Droplet's body felt stiff, taut, as if her skin was a net that had held her for too long. And then, in the next glorious instant, she broke free. Her muscles and bones and skin *stretched*, the good kind of stretch that popped stiff joints and shook off fatigue. She relaxed into the form of a gorilla—a male goldback weighing in at 400 pounds. Weather-warped, splintering boards creaked under her new knuckles.

When Moss had first let her go on vigilante missions, Droplet had favored big-cat forms. The confidence that came from walking around with literal handfuls of blades was unbeatable. But without opposable thumbs, her most fearsome nemesis had become that wily foe: the closed door. Shifting was nigh-

instantaneous, but it took energy, and a shifter always needed a few moments to adjust to the muscles and senses of the new form. Every second mattered in a fight or escape.

Gorillas were no slouches in the “sight and hearing” department, but after the owl, Droplet felt like a blanket had dropped on her head. But the smells of the bay rushed in—the underlying odor of dead fish and dockside trash left something to be desired, and the salty, clean breeze of night blew in off the sea.

No time to waste. The cart-pushers and boat-driver were coming. She put on the bone necklace—she needed her hands free, and the bone wouldn’t interfere with any necessary shape-changes. Shapeshifting was a part of her; not even a necromancer could stop her from shifting.

Droplet lifted the tarps. Under them sat three crates sealed against light and sound. Simple spells. Astonishingly, the spellcasters had not thought to spell against a gorilla’s arm strength. She grabbed the side of the closest crate and ripped it clean away.

Inside the crate was a person.

A hybrid.

Humans, curse them, probably wouldn’t use the word “person” to describe hybrids. Casualties of old magic gone wrong, a blend of at least two different animals and permanently stuck in between, hybrids could be dismissed as “not *really* people” whenever it was convenient for the humans and raptors in charge.

Droplet didn’t know why these people were locked up, and she didn’t care. She just needed to get them out.

The person in the first crate, by all appearances a normal, large gray dog, growled “Thank you!” before fleeing into the night.

The second crate held a person with a more balanced mixture of cat and human. Her gray tabby fur puffed up all over; tufts extended around the collar of her fish-scale dress and the straps of her sandals, and the Sea Goddess clip on her head stood up vertically. If the situation hadn’t been so dire, the effect would have been comical. Her ears lay flat, and her pupils were so wide that her eyes were almost black.

“Okay. Okay. A gorilla. I was not expecting this, but here we are,” said the hybrid. Droplet stood back to allow the chattering hybrid out of the narrow box. She slunk out, her fluffed-up tail getting in her face as she emerged. She stood on hind legs nearly as long as a human’s but jointed like a cat’s, and she stretched as tall as she could, ears flicking in every direction. “They grabbed me at The Mouse’s Last Stand and said something about ‘quota.’ Maybe ‘two more until quota’? One said he’d be glad once midsummer was over.”

Droplet nodded at the cat’s words, encouraging her to continue as she described more of the smells, sights, and sounds she’d observed before she’d been put in the crate. The woman didn’t seem to look at the nod but kept narrating anyway, scanning the shoreline.

The hybrid in the third crate—a feather-covered human—screamed at the sight of a gorilla effortlessly tearing open crates; they leapt past Droplet and dove into the water. Droplet couldn’t blame them.

“Look out!” the cat-hybrid shouted, shoving at Droplet’s right side like a duckling trying to move a boulder.

Spooked by the touch more than the shout, Droplet jumped to her left and heard something whiz past her ear. She whirled and stood on her hind legs. The cart had arrived at the dock, the two mysterious cart-pullers now armed and ready. The raptor held up their hands, preparing to cast a spell; nothing for Droplet to worry about with her bone charm on.

The human had a crossbow.

Great.

Thankfully, reloading a crossbow took time. And Droplet had been itching to take them head-on.

Droplet dropped to all fours, squared her shoulders, and charged, bellowing as she pounded down the dock, boards shaking under her feet. The raptor mage waved their hands in a quick arc, and a rope of fire whipped through the air toward her. Trusting in her bone necklace, Droplet charged on.

When the fire *did* burn her, sheer momentum kept her barreling down the dock. She bellowed again, instinctively, out of pain.

In a just universe, the sight of a bellowing, charging gorilla who was literally on fire would have sent these people fleeing.

Instead, the mage raised their hands again.

Droplet kept charging for a few more feet, until she smacked into a wall of air with a soft *fwump* that rattled her from head to feet. At least the impact put the fire out. Once stopped in her tracks, she finally realized what was going on.

The mage was using blood magic.

Immensely powerful, immensely illegal, blood magic could do almost anything when the caster had enough willing or unwilling blood donors. Droplet's bone necklace, a formidable shield against the everyday elemental magic she'd thought she'd face, was about as much use as a paper dagger in a pub brawl.

Droplet would have to think her way out of this.

She *hated* thinking her way out.

She weighed her options. None were good. Shifting was only so much help. They'd stopped one of her larger forms with ease; a smaller form would fare no better.

Behind the humans, the cart still held its tarp-covered cargo. At least one person could be under there—maybe more, depending on the species. But the blood mages could be carrying provisions and supplies. A gorilla's senses weren't keen enough to tell the difference, even without the burnt-fur smell interfering. A large broom was painted on the tarp—a street sweeper's cart? Had the blood mages stolen from street sweepers?

In the pause for thought, the pain from the burns settled deeper even though the flames had gone out. And over the lap of water came a distant muttering...

"...and yes, I know this is a bad idea. She can tell me 'I told you so' later," said the cat-hybrid.

With dread in her stomach, Droplet looked over her shoulder.

The hybrid held giant splinters of the crate walls. She tucked them under her arms, took a deep breath, and charged.

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BE NOT AFRAID

By Nicola Kapron

Length: Short Story

Rating: General Audiences

Genre: Modern Apocalyptic, M/M

Tags: OMG they were roommates, pining to lovers, siblings, self-sacrifice, angels and demons

Summary: Tora survives the end of the world, and so does his sister, even though he can't escape the niggling feeling that one or both of them shouldn't have. Still, that's not his immediate problem. No, he's more concerned about his demon roommate and his odd-job daily gig.



“Please listen to my prayer.”

The sound of feathers rustling.

“Please...please. I don't care what happens to me.”

A cough. The taste of blood.

“Please save her.”

Eyes, infinite eyes, gazing from every direction with judgement sharp enough to cut. Sharp enough to kill.

Someone spoke then, but Tora couldn't hear them. He couldn't hear anything over the sound of the divine judging everything he was, finding him unworthy, and breaking him down like dust in the wind.

*

Tora woke with tears on his face and a bizarre certainty that he had died and gone to hell. Then he registered the familiar ceiling with the big water stain over his bed and realized he was in his shitty one-room apartment. His black hair was so messy that tangled curls filled his peripheral vision. He'd fallen asleep in a tank top and shorts, but it had ridden up at some point during the night, and now was more of a crop top. He wouldn't care except that there was a shadow over his face and, uncomfortably close, the sound of noodles being slurped. Tora yanked his shirt down irritably and sat up.

Sure enough, his roommate was sitting cross-legged in midair above him, eating ramen.

“What...?” Tora's tongue wasn't cooperating. He smacked his lips a few times before he tried speaking again. “What are you doing, Rei?”

Rei sneered at him and continued picking up noodles with his chopsticks. It was objectively an incredibly rude thing to do.

Because it was Rei, it was also unfairly attractive, and Tora should not have to put up with being so confused right after waking up. On one hand, Rei was quite possibly the most beautiful person Tora had ever seen. Clear beige skin without a single imperfection, a waterfall of fine, dark hair, broad shoulders, a sinuous waist, and eyes so sharp and intense that meeting them felt like a knife between the ribs. And that wasn't even touching on the elegant, white-feathered wings sprouting from his shoulders. On the other hand, Rei looked so hilariously pissed off all the time that Tora was spared the full brunt of his hotness. And thank God for that; if he had to stare at the full, unmoderated glory of Rei, his eyes might melt out of his skull.

Fortunately, being a weird, angry asshole was Tora's roommate's default state.

"Is this really how you intend to spend the rest of your life?"

"I was sleeping," Tora grumbled.

"How boring."

"Stop watching me sleep if it's so boring."

"No," Rei said. "How about you stop sleeping so much?"

"You knew what you were getting into when you agreed to room with a mortal, Rei."

Rei curled his lip. "You're up, so get up. We have work today."

"I have work," Tora corrected him. "You are not in any way required to come along and help out." It felt odd to be so blunt, but one had to be clear with demons or risk getting nabbed in an implied contract. And Rei, despite looking positively angelic, was definitely a demon. With that beauty and that level of casual power, he couldn't be anything but.

"I am aware. What I do, I do because I want to."

Tora squinted at him. Rei's explanation felt too easy. But Rei was scooping up the last few noodles in his package of instant ramen, and Tora had now been awake long enough to remember that hunger existed. He got up and headed over to the kitchenette and the cheap card table they were using for meals. Rei followed. By the time Tora had retrieved some decent cereal and settled down with a bowl, Rei had tossed his old ramen and opened a new container.

Somehow, his second helping was already cooked and steaming. It was really unfair. If Tora had the kind of power Rei threw around carelessly, he wouldn't use it to cook ramen. Phenomenal cosmic power should be used to do important things, like—

Read the rest on September 28th!

THEIRS ALL ALONG

By boneturtle

Length: Short Story

Rating: Explicit

Genre: Fantasy, M/M/M

Tags: Smut and feels, getting together

Summary: The god Aren has been sent by the heavenly court to infiltrate the army of the demon king Samael. He's expecting the mission to be difficult; what he's not expecting is the sparks that fly every time he's sparring with Samael or helping Samael's husband Mithros with his work...



Samael's hand cushions the back of Aren's head just before he hits the back wall of the cave. He holds Aren, barely breathing, in stark contrast to how hard Aren is panting.

Samael is ungodly beautiful. Not surprising, given that he's the king of demons.

He's also bested Aren once again. He'd demanded to spar, to test Aren's readiness to serve in his guard. Why? Because Aren has told him that he is Toren, a lesser demon from a fringe territory intent on serving His Highness.

So far, Aren's attempts to prove himself have been less than successful. His sword lies in the dirt in the center of the cave while he stands completely at Samael's mercy. The king's sharp teeth press on the sensitive flesh of his neck, as if he really intends to bite through the tendon there.

It would be so easy for him to do so.

Samael pulls back slightly, a smirk dancing on his lips as he seems to read Aren's mind. "You'd like that, wouldn't you, Toren? If I devoured you."

Aren gulps. He's trapped between Samael's broad, muscular body and the wall of the cave, Samael's face so close that their breath mingles. A shiver runs down his spine, makes his legs weak. For some reason, he licks his lips. Closes his eyes.

As his lips fall open, the warmth surrounding him retreats. He opens his eyes to find Samael halfway across the cave, picking up Aren's sword and wiping the dust from it. In a blink, he's standing before Aren again. He lazily slides the sword into the sheath strapped to Aren's back. Their cheeks are so close that Samael's loose and wild hair brushes against Aren's

overheated skin. His words ghost across the tender shell of Aren's ear.

"My, letting others handle your sword already. What a troublesome recruit."

Aren lets out a breath that's almost a moan.

Samael chuckles. "I won't accept anyone other than me touching this." His hand slides from the sword hilt to the braid that hangs down Aren's back—the braid Samael had insisted on tying himself before they sparred, dragging his fingers over Aren's sensitive scalp—fingers stopping just above Aren's hips.

Aren can only shiver, standing perfectly still as he waits to either be ravaged or have his head cut cleanly off, depending on the demon king's whim. But Samael does neither; instead, he turns and walks leisurely toward the cave entrance, not sparing a glance back as he sways his hips with his movements.

Aren follows, as Samael must know he will.

*

There are only so many gods the demon king and his lover haven't already met and won't kill on sight. Aren, a god who's spent most of his godhood locked in the heavenly court, is one of them. So it had been no surprise to Aren when the court had selected him to become their spy. Desperate for freedom, he had accepted without much thought.

He should have given it more thought.

Not only has Samael been deliberately provoking him, but now it appears that Samael's husband, his precious lover Mithros, is the god Mitra's sibling.

Mitra is one of the only gods that Aren is on good terms with. They're popular with humans and gods alike, easygoing, laid back to the point of appearing to lie flat. Despite this, they have somehow always managed to get their work done with impeccable skill.

Relying on their friendship, Aren has visited Mitra's palace today on a vague assignment from Samael. ("The god of fertility has a jewel I would like for myself.") As usual, Samael has tied up Aren's hair with the excuse that Aren needs to look like one of his subordinates. Aren has begun to suspect that Samael simply enjoys playing with his hair.

But, as he's about to greet Mitra, he catches sight of someone he never thought he'd see in such an ostentatious place: Mithros. His straight nose, elegant pout, and dark, almost-blue skin, so distinct from the typical gray of water demons, draw Aren's gaze like an inescapable current. Their eyes meet, and Mithros's lips part slightly as though he's preparing to speak.

Aren freezes.

Luckily, Mitra remembers that Aren is pretending to be “Toren the lesser demon.”

Unluckily, Mitra is a terrible actor.

They bow to Aren. “Ah, Toren, is it?” (Aren hadn’t introduced himself yet). “I see you’ve come to help my brother.” (Why would he just...assume that?). Mitra seems to realize they’re off track, scratches their ear. “Uh, I guess...I would think that’s why you’re here, right?”

Behind Mitra, Mithros covers his smile with his hand, gray-blue eyes crinkling. He holds a stack of ledgers in his other hand.

No wonder Mitra can act so laid back yet never fall behind on their work. They’re not *doing* their work. Mithros has been doing it for them.

Aren clears his throat. “Yes, of course.” He bows. “The king sent me to assist His Lordship with the accounting, since I am still useless with a sword.”

“Good, good. Always good to hear my brother is getting the respect he deserves.” Mitra gives Aren a wink.

Aren has never felt more embarrassed to be on the wrong side of this ridiculous rivalry. He follows Mithros down the hall to a small office with a wall of windows covered by sheer linen curtains.

Mithros sets down the scrolls and crooks a finger at Aren. There is something appraising in his gaze as Aren approaches.

“How can I help you, my lord?” Aren asks.

Mithros reaches for Aren’s hair and curves his long, nimble fingers around Aren’s ear as he tucks the strands back. His lips purse slightly, his brow pinched, as he studies every small mark on Aren’s skin.

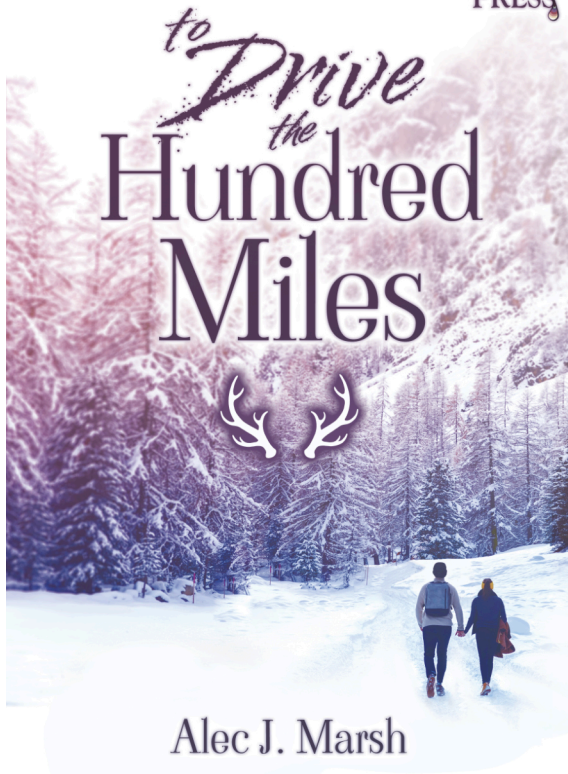
“Samael has been hard on you,” Mithros says quietly. It’s not a question.

“I’m fine, haha.” Aren tries to laugh it away, but he’s cut off by Mithros’s hands on his face, fingers massaging behind his jaw. Mithros is slightly smaller than Aren, and he steps closer to reach comfortably.

“You’ve worked hard,” Mithros murmurs. He drops his hands, then sits on a cushion in front of the desk. “Come keep me company.”

This story, and two more equally steamy, are available now! [Check out the Pet Names 'verse!](#)

DUXXX
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To Drive the Hundred Miles
by Alec J. Marsh

Serendipity, WA is filled with Christmas cheer, beautiful mountain views, and trans man Will's feminist Wiccan family. Home for the holidays, he avoids their clumsy attempts at support by hiding in the local coffee shop and flirting with Bea, a friend from high school. The beautiful landscapes can't make up for the realities of being queer in a small town, and Bea wants out. Will grabs for a prosperity spell, and finds a new way to connect to the magic he's become estranged from. New romance and optimism get them through the holidays, ready to face their next problems.

PRE-ORDERS OPEN IN OCTOBER, 2023!

TO DRIVE THE HUNDRED MILES

By Alec J. Marsh

Length: Novella

Rating: Explicit

Genre: Modern with a splash of magic, F/M

Tags: Getting together, trans main character, family feels, confronting the past

Summary: Serendipity, WA is filled with Christmas cheer, beautiful mountain views, and trans man Will's feminist Wiccan family. Home for the holidays, he avoids their clumsy attempts at support by hiding in the local coffee shop and flirting with Bea, a friend from high school. The beautiful landscapes can't make up for the realities of being queer in a small town, and Bea wants out. Will grabs for a prosperity spell, and finds a new way to connect to the magic he's become estranged from. New romance and optimism get them through the holidays, ready to face their next problems.



Chapter 1

I was in a tiny vintage shop in Nob Hill when Mom called me for the third time that day. I cast a furtive look at the attendant, who was helping another Christmas shopper, and guiltily answered the call. I didn't like to talk on the phone in public, but everyone else was busy and loud too, and if I didn't answer soon she would probably panic.

"Hi Mom," I said. I poked through a tray of tarnished silver jewelry. I didn't know what I was looking for, but it probably wasn't this. Mom had enough jewelry to put Stevie Nicks to shame. Hers was the last gift I had to buy, and the hardest.

"Oh, sweetheart, I'm so glad you picked up. I was getting worried." There it was. The invention of the cell phone should have been a boon to anxious parents, but sometimes I thought it was more of a leash because my mom expected me to be available at all times.

"I was at work." My voice came out more clipped than I wanted, almost sullen. It was hard for me to keep my tone even when she fussed at me.

"I called you six hours ago—"

“It was three,” I said, and sighed. Temping wasn’t a regular job, but it kept my hours roughly in the range of a 9-5, and Mom didn’t seem to understand that. Whenever she talked about “adult jobs,” she conjured up images of *The Office*, places where people sat around talking about their relationships and never actually worked.

“Look,” I said, trying to steer the conversation back on track, “what was it you wanted to talk to me about?”

“I thought you were driving up today, and I wanted to know when you’d get in.”

I carefully unclenched my jaw and took a deep breath before I answered. “I’m coming on Monday.” I lingered on a pendant shaped like a pair of antlers that might have been ivory. It was pretty, but I wasn’t shopping for me, and wearing jewelry increased my chances of getting misgendered. I moved on to a hat rack crammed with scarves in a riot of colors.

“The Solstice is Tuesday,” she said. “That’s barely any time at all. And I was going to cook dinner for you and Rhiannon tonight.”

“I have to work through Sunday,” I said. “Pre-Christmas rush.” Answering angry tweets about toy availability wasn’t my ideal weekend, but it was a good excuse to get out of spending more time with my family. As it was, I would be arriving the night before the Winter Solstice and leaving on Boxing Day, and those six days were about as much as I could stand.

“Aunt Hazel is coming over tonight, and she was so looking forward to seeing you.”

I knew what to say in response. *Mom, please don’t make me feel guilty for having other commitments.* I bit my tongue. It was a lot easier when I was practicing with a therapist, but I knew in reality that setting boundaries with her only made her defensive or teary, and it didn’t actually change her behavior.

Passivity wasn’t exactly the same as emotional maturity, but it was progress of some kind.

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I’ll see you Monday night.”

“I swear you said you were coming this weekend.”

That wasn’t my problem. Mom always made me feel crazy, as if I was secretly terrible at communicating, as if I never expressed myself. When I had shaved my head and come out the summer before I ran away to Portland for college, she had cried about how she was so shocked and confused and wished I had told her sooner.

It wasn’t my fault that none of my diatribes about gendered expectations had tipped her off.

“I wanted to talk to you about the Solstice ritual,” she said. “I guess we should do it now.”

I braced myself and grunted an affirmative.

“Were you planning on participating?”

“Why else would I come back that far before Christmas?” I blurted before I could stop myself. I tugged a brown cashmere scarf printed with orange autumn leaves out of the rack, and a dozen more came with it. I sorted through them, hanging them back up as Mom talked.

“Well, it’s just...now that you’re exploring other options, I wasn’t sure you would want to.”

I clenched my fists around the scarf I had been attempting to free. She was trying her best to be supportive. I knew this was her way of saying that I didn’t have to participate. My family’s coven was very into the divine feminine, and all their rituals were about invoking the Triple Goddess, thanking Mother Earth, bleeding onto the ground, the whole shebang. There had been no boys born to the coven in the eighty years since it was founded. No one except me, and it had taken seventeen years for me to figure out that cosmic mix-up.

Maybe I wasn’t exactly dialed into the divine feminine. Maybe weekly rituals praising the moon cycle made me want peel my skin off, but I still resented that they had been taken from me. I had been raised to mark the wheel of the year with my family, and I felt adrift without those rituals.

“I want to be there,” I said, and I meant it, and I regretted it. Someone would say something stupid and remind me that I didn’t belong anymore. Either I was a woman and could do magic, or I was a man and was barred from it. I hated the dichotomy of their views, and I refused to let them shut me out entirely. I had never felt magic like they did, which I suspected was because I had been a man since long before I could put words to the feelings of emptiness I experienced. They didn’t need to know that. They didn’t get to feel superior because by accident of birth they were blessed with a gender identity that was deemed more sacred. I would be there in their circle, and they would be reminded that their sacred dichotomy wasn’t as simple as they wanted to believe.

“Okay honey,” Mom said, doubt clear in her voice. “I’m looking forward to seeing you.”

“I’ll text you when I’m leaving,” I promised. The scarf I was currently twisting into knots was exactly her colors. I hoped she would like it.



I followed the familiar six-hour route north into the Wenatchee Forest, then through the increasingly narrow highways until I reached Serendipity, Washington. It was an old mining town, but the name had certainly been attractive to my great-grandmother, the founder of our coven. I felt a twinge of nostalgia as I drove between the old saloon storefronts mixed in with fast-food joints and boarded-up buildings. The sky was an icy blue bowl stretching overhead, ringed on all sides with mountains. It was beautiful in a way the city could never be.

Mom lived on the edge of town, practically urban. Most of the population lived in houses scattered along the single forest road that ran through town, surrounded by more lodgepole pines than people. I parked in the driveway and took a moment to prepare myself. It was biting cold, and remnants of snow banked up over her carefully tended garden, but the walkway was clear.

The house looked the same as always, sage green, the roof sagging in the middle. It wasn't run-down, but there was an air of tiredness about it that showed how many people had lived in it. I looked at the silver moon painted on the door and steeled myself.

I pulled my backpack and duffel bag out of the back seat and headed up the steps. The porch was cluttered with weathered dining chairs, and pitchforks and snow shovels leaned haphazardly against the railing. I hesitated at the door, wondering if I had been away long enough to need to knock. I erred on the side of politeness and did.

It was the wrong choice, and I knew as soon as I did it. No one else in my family ever knocked, and they rarely called ahead to say they were coming. A love for rules was a unique trait to me, a desperate need for order in a chaotic world. It was the kind of gesture I saw as proper etiquette and everyone else saw as icy aloofness or pretension.

Mom opened the door looking worried and frazzled. Her eyes flicked over me, and for a moment I had the wild fear that she wouldn't recognize me. We hadn't seen each other since she'd driven down to Portland State to watch me graduate six months before, and I had changed a lot since then. Then I remembered FaceTime calls, and also, even if I passed now, I still had the same face as I'd always had.

I mirrored my mom in more ways than I liked: the same high-bridged nose (elegant, she had always called it), pale-blue eyes and brown hair that refused to have any semblance of texture. Mine was cropped short now, the sides shaved clean and smooth, and Mom's was streaked with gray, but we still looked related.

“Oh Goddess,” she said breathlessly, and pulled me into the house. “Oh, sweetheart, oh—” She seemed at a loss for words. She traced her hands over my cheekbones, stronger since the T really started to take, and then over the stubble across my jaws. It still couldn’t be considered a full beard, but just the shadow made me feel better.

“Will, are you hungry?” my sister Rhiannon interrupted Mom.

“Yes, please. Where’s Misty?” My niece was three and would be a perfect buffer between me and the rest of my family.

“Brian has her for the night.”

Distracted by Rhiannon’s mention of food, Mom pulled away from me and hurried to the kitchen. My shoulders eased in relief.

Rhiannon pulled me into a tight hug. “You look great,” she said. “I think your voice has changed more.”

I wasn’t sure I wanted the frank comments on my body any more than I wanted Mom’s clumsy avoidance. It was still a relief to know that she wasn’t going to be weird about it. Not that she’d ever been weird about that specifically.

“You look good too,” I said, and meant it. Somehow, even with a toddler, she managed to look stylish and effortlessly feminine in the way I knew took a lot of effort.

“How’re...things?” I asked lamely. I glanced after Mom.

“She’s thrilled to see you,” Rhiannon assured me.

“I know,” I said glumly.

“Will, don’t,” Rhiannon said in the long-suffering tone of an older sister. “Please, can we just get along for the week? You know how hard she tries, and she’s been great about pronouns and everything lately.”

I nodded, wishing I could avoid the song-and-dance of forgiving slip-ups that they’d had five years to correct.

Mom leaned her head back into the living room. “Come on,” she said. “Pie’s ready.”

PRE-ORDERS FOR *TO DRIVE THE HUNDRED MILES* OPEN
OCTOBER 5, 2023! [Follow us on social media](#) or [sign up for our newsletter](#) to make sure you get notified when it’s available!