

## Swamp Girl

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There are three things I need you to understand about wetness.

First: It slides along a spectrum. This is the way that God intended.

The second—it precludes the creation of light.

*“Now the earth was formless and empty. Darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness.”*

Do you know a more powerful threat than division?

The third I’ve forgotten. I hope you’ll forgive me.

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Raidine was not born. She was a fever who brewed in the heart of the ocean.

There is something you must understand about the things that collect on the ocean floor. They are not what they once were. The ocean is vast; the floor is its memory and its future. “You are very, very young,” becomes, “You are very, very old.” Time and its vast collection of impressions dissolve and diffuse, gaining the sentient and

mysterious quality of presence—then, without warning, absence.

Lost becomes found; shipwrecks become reefs; microbes megafauna. Sea stars lose their legs and wonder why *reaching* ever mattered to anyone. Love becomes hatred and then once again love, this time edged with the threat of inversion. The things that collect on the ocean floor know that the tail ends of all things circle themselves and one another, drifting down, down, down, indefinitely. And God said that it was good.

But sometimes, on a rare and moonless night, fingers of unknown origin reach into that salty, primordial soup and drag something out. Exposed to light—oh!—the spirals tighten and relax like the vagus nerve—fainting, shitting, orgasm. Have you ever been born? Then you cannot understand. And also, you know exactly what I am talking about.

Raidine was not born. She was a fever who brewed in the heart of the ocean.

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Unfortunately, neither “*fever*” nor “*heart of the ocean*” are palatable answers to the question, “Where are you from, honey?” So when attendants in the carpool line or out-of-towners at the diner asked, Raidine just said, “Right here, smack dab in the middle of the Everglades.” It wasn’t a problem. Florida has a way of forgiving the past.

If you caught her swimming, she might tell you something different.

“Ma always told me I was from the front porch,” she once told a landscaper between backstrokes. “They found me out there on a warm sunny day.” *Push, glide.* “Back when things were better than they are right now.” *Glide, push.* “Back when they still taught kids how to behave.”

He chuckled and shook his head, pushing metal through thick grass. He was a stranger to gliding. “There are stories about you, girl.”

The closest Raidine ever got to telling the truth was in the oversized ear of Johnny Reed, the first boy she ever kissed. “One night, Pa was out on the boat because he couldn't sleep,” she told him. Her tongue was still salty from the sweat of his upper lip. “I think he'd drank one too many.”

Johnny was all ears. She told him about Ma and Pa's other daughter—the one with dark hair and blue eyes who had gone missing the week before. “Pa said he was crying over the edge of the boat, saying her name over and over, when he heard something crying. He thought surely it was her, so he jumped right in and started swimming.”

She ran her fingers down Johnny's purple, pimply cheek. “There I was—lying there on a big ol' lily pad, naked and fussing. I was blonde as a toad, barely any hair on my head at all. The only time I stopped crying was when they put me in the bath. Said I fell right asleep. So, I guess you could say I'm from Florida. But all I know is, I'm from the water.”

Johnny never did tell anyone. He didn't hear anything she said after "naked."

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Ma and Pa sent Raidine to church on Sundays. "You need saving, girl," Ma was always muttering. But to be very perfectly clear, Raidine liked it: the way everybody sat still, the silence that spilled out of the organ pipes after the homily.

She always went alone. "Did my time," Pa said when he shoed her out the door. He packed her a mayonnaise sandwich and kissed her on the forehead. "Say hi to The Big Guy for me, froggie." Seemed like Pa missed The Big Guy, but maybe too much to say hello himself.

When Raidine called him "The Big Guy" in Sunday school, the teacher's forehead wrinkled. "Oh dear," she said nervously. "Best to call him 'God.'"

For 45 minutes on Sunday mornings, Raidine learned everything there was to know about everything: the age of the earth, for one—young and inexperienced. That snakes and apples were bad news, and gardens should always have gates. She learned that the earth could be annihilated by floodwaters—that people could make God angry, even if it wasn't on purpose. That kings retained special privileges, and that women should never, under any circumstances, bathe on rooftops. The semiotics of rainbows. The sound of fire.

She learned that *really living* required sacrifice; that sacrifice was just a kindled word for death. That death can

be splintered into tiny pieces. That it can get into the water and live in your bones, if you aren't careful. That the devil was God's most beautiful creature.

But above all, Raidine learned that the most important thing you could do in this life was take a careful and vigilant interest in the contractual obligations of the soul.

“What is a soul?” Raidine asked.

The teacher shook her head and thought for a minute. A thin gray hair stuck to the underside of her jaw. “It's the part of you that belongs to God,” she finally said. “And when you ask Jesus to come into your heart, He saves it.” Raidine nodded. That settled it. The Jesus part shouldn't be too hard. She had always liked him, the way he was always dipping his hand into wells. Finding a soul was the thing.

Raidine's favorite part of the service was after it was over. She hid in a brown bathroom stall, white stockings and black shoes making telltale marks on the porcelain seat. When everyone left and they turned the big light off, she crept out into the sanctuary, through the hallway, down the stairs, into The Big Guy's back of house.

This is where Raidine learned the most about Jesus—so many things she could have never guessed he'd need. Paperclips, for one. Gin, for another. A pair of women's black loafers. A big plastic gallon jug of distilled water labeled, “HOLY.” Worth a shot. She crossed herself and drank it all down. She never felt particularly different after this private ceremony, but when things started to go

sideways, she took to wondering if that was why. Maybe The Big Guy was dehydrated.

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On the sixth day, The Big Guy created man, and he created woman.

*“Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky...”*

It is easy to miss. The image of God is not a thing with two legs. It is union with an edge of domination—

*“God blessed them and said to them, ‘Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.’”*

And God saw that it was good.

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When Raidine was sixteen, Ma conducted the ceremony of *the talk*.

“But under NO circumstances, Raidine, is this to take place before you are good and married,” warned Ma. “This is a holy thing, meant for a man and his bride.”

“Why not?” Raidine asked. It didn’t sound much different from swimming.

Ma's body trembled like it did when she was angry. "Your souls get glued together," she said quietly. "And then you're stuck that way, whether you like it or not."

Raidine nodded, an understanding finally clicking into place because, finally, after all this time, there it was. Directions for a soul.

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It was the Year of our Lord 1968. South Florida. Once upon a time. We begin the way fairy tales do—the horizon, a cloud of smoke, and a handsome prince on a noble steed.

Ma, Pa, and Raidine felt the rumble of that red-striped Camaro over kitchen table bills. Ma was squabbling about somebody's extravagant use of e-lec-tricity when the table began to shiver. "Quick!" Pa said. "It's the rapture!" He reached up and snatched the pull chain, plunging the room into darkness. "Get on your knees!"

When Henry knocked on the door, he found them reverent. "Jesus?" whispered Raidine. She looked up at him with green eyes, gleaming wet, and for a moment he could have sworn he saw her baring her teeth. The sun cooled to an aqua blue. Her beauty was the kind that belonged in the dark.

"Fell in love with her right then and there," he would later grin.

Henry didn't take them up to heaven, but he did stay for dinner. Pa promised him a gumbo as soon as they could

catch a chicken. When Ma offered him her best chair and footstool, he said “yes” without taking off his shoes.

Outside, the clouds turned black and Raidine’s dress pockets bled red, stuffed with mayhaw berries for a pie. She was wading in the water.

*This is your chance, girl,* said the swamp. In a place where the water is still, things grow uneasy. Things grow restless. She opened her mouth to sing. She called down the rain.

A peal of thunder cracked across the porch—no lightning in its eyes, but yes, laughter. The door burst open. “By golly! I didn’t think a storm was brewin’!” said Henry, like he was on a stage. “Quick, help me cover the car!”

They were no match for the water. It dragged across the land in torrents, its only friend the wind. The things that could fly flew, and the things that could float floated. The rest drowned. The flood came up to the doorstep, but no further. The Camaro drifted away. Henry wept into Raidine’s shoulder. She smiled and kissed him on the forehead and told him it would be alright. A miracle was on its way.

A week later, there was another knock at the door—a priest in a green steel canoe. A mysterious urging of the Lord had pushed him eastward. When the family asked him to marry the two young lovers, how could he refuse? They held the ceremony on the roof. Raidine wore Ma’s whitest nightgown with a lace tablecloth carefully pinned to her wet hair. When she said, “I do,” a ripple

spread out from the house as far as the eye could see. The bride's heart leapt. She had been clearing out a space in the middle of herself, and it was almost time to be whole.

For the wedding feast, they opened every last can in the house—baked beans and peas and carrots and beets and those tiny baby corns. Ma even cracked open the tin of biscuits and the jar of raspberry jam she had been hiding under the bed. Everybody beamed.

The couple borrowed the priest's canoe as a marriage bed. For once, even Henry was quiet. The only sound was a hum behind the lips of everything that lived. Raidine lifted the white nightgown over her head. It caught on her nipples like fishhooks.

“Flesh of my flesh,” she whispered into his ear.

“Bone of my boner,” grinned Henry. He was not afraid to take what was his. He pushed his fingers into her until he was afraid that they would break. Her body split open, and water that smelled like old apples gushed out of her like she was being drained. She gasped and fell back into his arms, rocking the boat. For the first time, she was afraid of falling in.

That night, Raidine dreamed the inside of her opened up like a churchyard. Something small and insignificant tapped her on the shoulder. A raven landed at her feet. On her right side, the smallest breeze kissed her on the cheek and whispered, “Goodbye.” Something in the middle of her dropped out, and her mouth took on the taste of blood. A thousand questions hit her eye from the inside.

The first: “What have I done?” The second: the ache of girlhood, the pain of womanhood.

Henry slept soundly. He woke up scratching his armpits. They smelled like his woman’s sticky rotten apple juice. “What happened last night?” he asked, his grin impish. “Was I good?”

She was sitting up straighter and quieter than he had ever seen her. “You gave me a soul,” she said. He laughed and tweaked her nipple. His new wife was really something else.

“Let’s go home,” Henry said, handing her the oars. “I can’t wait to see the Leons’ faces when they get a load of this.”

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You know what happened on the seventh day, don’t you?

*“Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.”*

One week into the whole thing, and God said: “Leave me alone. I am already tired of your shit.”

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The first time Raidine walked into Paradise Springs, Henry pulled her along like a dog on a leash.

“You live in an amusement park?” she asked. Baby blue slides snaked through the sky, wrapping around each

other like a set of polyurethane intestines that were poorly reconstructed after a knife fight. Screams dwarfed the sun. The smell of chlorine hung thick.

“Baby baby baby,” he said, thrusting his hands into the air. “You may be amused, but this is no park.” He grinned. “It’s a lifestyle.”

He handed her a business card: *General Manager, Paradise Springs*. In tiny print at the bottom: *Keeping You Young Since 1513*. His hand drifted across her hip. “What’s the wife of a General called? First General Lady? Generalady? Something like that?”

They settled on the edge of the lazy river, a gaggle of geckos darting back and forth between them. Swimmers floated by, perched on bright blue inner tubes. An ancient, leathery creature in a red bikini spun in slow, clumsy circles. A dumb smile held her mouth down as though by force. *See what I can do?* the water leered at Raidine, and she shuddered to think that she had ever been made of that mojo.

“Let’s get in,” Henry grinned. “You’ve gotta taste this stuff.” He stood up tall and peeled off his clothes like a self-possessed banana. A cannonball was his entrance of choice. Raidine backed away from the concrete edge, shaking her head.

Later, the newlyweds copulated in a pink-tiled shower hut. The water that splattered out was metallic and green, shimmering across their bodies in shallow currents. When they made love, Raidine was obedient. She let Henry

permeate and pioneer the newly forged caverns of her body. He didn't seem to mind that she closed her eyes tight. When she did, she saw the face of Mother Mary leaning in to kiss her on the cheek.

“Where is Jesus?” Raidine wanted to ask. “I thought I'd be with Jesus.” But Mary always seemed to anticipate her question, like, *I get that a lot*. She put a finger up to her lips and winked.

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On the happy couple's third day in town, they finally ran into Henry's ex-girlfriend.

“Ex-fiancée,” Birdie corrected him, her smile red and bloodless. “I've still got the ring, see?” All Raidine saw was dark hair, sapphire eyes, and a mouth like Ma's.

“Anyway.” Birdie ran her hands through Henry's hair. “Daddy needs to see you, baby. There's been another...incident.”

They walked up the hill to the family mansion, where Mr. Leon poured unevenly distributed portions of Kentucky rye. “My, well aren't you a treat,” he said to Raidine, handing her the biggest glass. His body seemed to be composed of parts—willow tree, yellow teeth, handlebar mustache, gold rush.

Raidine and Birdie made themselves useful in the kitchen.

“I love him, you know,” Birdie said. They were buttering bread. The words slipped into the air like little mosquitoes. Raidine turned towards her, but Birdie’s eyes were closed as in death, as in prayer.

“I don’t,” Raidine finally said. The butter had gone soft. “But I need him.”

For a moment, their futures fluttered in the air, like a kite that has yet to learn of its tether. Then, Birdie threw her arms around Raidine. “In that case, we’re sisters.” From that day forward, never did anyone see a better pair of friends. They exchanged recipe cards for milk-based gravies. Birdie taught Raidine how to paint her nails teriyaki red and file them into little points. They shared secrets, and sex tips, and some might say potions for survival.

But when Birdie laughed or cried or slept or sang, Raidine found herself licking her lips, thinking how the body is made up of so much water, wondering just how saved her soul could be.

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The trouble started as trouble often does—expired milk, bad timing, and a woman with a notion.

Raidine, Birdie, and Henry were stretched out across the beams of a dock in the mangrove swamp, a brackish hunger buried in their bones. It was late August: old heat, honey-colored light.

“If you knew it was going to take us so long to get here, then why didn’t you pack ice?” Birdie hissed. “I’m sooo thirsty.”

Henry groaned. “Suck a tit, Birdie.”

While they bickered, Raidine lay belly-down on the smooth, gray slats, pressing her ear to the swamp. Yearning is a master who deals in memories, and by golly that girl remembered the water. The cicadas swelled. A kingfisher spit strident, mechanical rattles.

The way you understand God depends on the way you understand time. The way you understand time depends on the way you understand its movements. *Raidine was a fever who brewed in the heart of the ocean.* The fever had broken, split into pieces large enough to hold the sharp and concrete edges of a human soul. But fevers do not deal in contracts, and swamps have a way of leaking.

“Y’all hear that?” Raidine lifted her cheek, rough and splintered from the wood.

“Not unless you’re talking about this senseless boy’s blabbering,” said Birdie, fire in her eyes.

“What’d ya hear, Rai?” asked Henry.

She looked towards the mangroves. “Over there,” she said. “Y’all ever sing ‘Jesus Loves Me’ in church?”

They listened. “I hear it,” said Birdie, her eyes dreamlike.

“It’s beautiful,” said Henry, quiet for once. Serene. Because it was. In a world where every sure-fire path leads towards destitution—towards unkempt, towards rot—the cool drink of comfort takes on the air of salvation. The sound was third-dimension coca-cola syrup communion, piney woods in summer, the cure to what ails ya. Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue. Aloe root for the eyes. Peace for the dead. *Jesus loves me. This I know.*

There’s almost no telling what happened next, but someone needs to tell it: Birdie, getting in the water. Quiet. Too quiet. A hum behind the mouth of everything that lives. Then, splashing. So much splashing. Like skin crawling. Like shedding.

Whoever tells you alligators are green is lying. They’re brown as mud.

Later, when they dragged Birdie’s body out of the mangrove roots, tangled, tattered, and ratchet, somebody asked: “Did she scream? She must have screamed.”

On the car ride back to town, Henry’s teeth began to chatter. “She must have screamed,” said Raidine. Henry shook his head, his face a costly shade of porcelain.

“You know what they say about souls that get stuck in the mangroves,” he said, not really to her. Raidine said nothing. She didn’t have to. He blew out all his breath. “They get stuck there. Like purgatory.”

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Birdie Leon's funeral was on a Tuesday afternoon, and afterwards the Leons hosted a lunch—paper doilies, potato salad, peanut butter pudding, and bright green grapes the size of golf balls. Raidine crossed her legs neatly under the blue tablecloth so nothing could get in and nothing could get out.

Raidine noticed the way everyone swished water around in their mouths, trying to get the peanut butter goo out from between their teeth. She tried it, but it only made the water taste like peanut butter. Instead, she flattened her tongue and opened her throat as wide as it would go so that she could drink without swallowing.

Mr. Leon clinked two knives together, a dull and tinny din.

“We're here to celebrate the life of our daughter, Birdie,” he said between sobs, gesturing to her toothy senior portrait. “She's with Jesus now, past the pearly gates.”

Henry's shoulders shook, like: *I know the truth.*

Mr. Leon continued. “Knowing her, she's eating french toast with the King of Kings and feeling altogether sorry for us poor folks down here.” No one said anything, but Henry let out a wail that pierced the veil between the front and the back of Raidine's chest.

“Now listen,” said Mr. Leon, his face slick with tears, “I said nobody cry!”

Try as she might, Raidine couldn't. Instead, she splashed some water on her face, uncrossed her legs, and wondered why, after all she had been through to get there, Birdie Leon got to see Jesus before she did.

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Autumn crept by without anyone noticing, and the Florida air only grew hotter, stiller. The swamp took on the air of rot, which meant it was brewing something generous and thick. Paradise Springs closed for the season. Algae congealed around the corners of the pools. The peacocks would have starved if not for an unending supply of stale ice cream cones. Henry stopped sleeping at home.

“Haven't seen him around here,” Mr. Leon shrugged to Raidine. He was scrubbing the stubborn stains off a silver spoon with his fingernails. “He blames you, you know,” he said, turning towards her. “But I don't.” The air smelled like grapefruit soap. “Say, what have you been doing all this time without your husband?”

“Praying,” Raidine answered. It was true. It was the only thing she could think to do. She prayed standing up and sitting down. She prayed “I'm sorry,” and “Forgive me,” and “I'll do anything.” She turned the fan on so that the prayer could widen out and fill the room, then turned it off in case it could be blown out like a flame. She prayed with her eyes closed and her eyes open. She prayed while eating buttered toast, promising “amen” with every swallow. She tried fasting so that her hunger would give the prayers an edge of desperation. She prayed at night and in the morning. She prayed naked, and she prayed afraid.

Mr. Leon grabbed the sides of her head with his soapy hands. “And?” A dollop rolled down her white neck and onto her collarbone, making her look like something sketched on vellum. She said nothing.

“Well, he’s a good boy,” Mr. Leon said. “He’ll come back. Pray harder.”

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The night Raidine gave up on Jesus, she went down to the mangroves. A spider web of CAUTION tape ribboned in the wind. The water and the sky dissolved into one single shade of deep and Persian blue. A small current came from nowhere, quietly zipping.

*Girl, said the water. Get in.*

There was nowhere else to go. Raidine closed her eyes and slipped beneath the surface. A hunger opened up in the pit of her belly and coolness spread around her lips without the farce of forgiveness. She let her body go completely slack. She did not say goodbye to her soul. It had never been her friend.

*There you are, said the water, and kindness came from everywhere. It bent around her body in waves, washing away the idea of pieces. A hand slipped into hers and squeezed. She opened her eyes, but there was no one there. When she opened the palm of her hand, she found a sharp little gray seashell. It had pricked her skin, and she was bleeding. A miracle was on its way.*

The next day, Birdie and Raidine walked back into town, hand in hand. If death is the state of a body gone cold, Birdie's blood was piping hot. A cherry-red blush burned her cheeks, and dirt hung off her dress like ornamentation. "A saint!" Henry screamed. "My baby's a saint!" He held her in his arms. No one said anything about her eyes, newly green, or about the wife Henry already had. No one said anything at all.

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Years can pass without anyone noticing. The following spring, Birdie and Henry got married and moved into Henry's one-bedroom bungalow. They still let Raidine sleep in the bed. She took to making handmade seashell jewelry while the happy couple had husband-and-wife time in the bathroom. What people did with their souls was no longer any of her business.

Idle hands are the devil's playthings, so Raidine's backstock was extravagant—chokers carefully threaded with lightning whelk and mother-of-pearl, earrings made of sand dollars dipped in forest green enamel, broaches dripping with sea glass, cowries, cockles, and conches, garnet and chameleon opal and vials of black sand and seaweed. She sold them in the Paradise Springs gift shop for dirt cheap.

The people who wore Raidine's jewelry claimed it gave them good fortune. A fisherman's wife finally learned to tie the knots. The lawyer's daughter's deadbeat boyfriend started wearing condoms. Ticket sales for Paradise Springs soared through the roof. Raidine never

wore her own jewelry, just a little gray seashell on a thread around her neck.

Birdie made heart-shaped pancakes for Raidine every Sunday morning. It was a gesture that lived somewhere in the tension between “Thank you,” and “I’m sorry.” When Henry fell asleep, Birdie would turn and drape her arm across Raidine’s body. When Birdie fell asleep, Raidine slipped out and headed for the water.

When things started to go south, no one really saw it coming. The fisherman’s wife tied the wrong knot, and the boat capsized. The lawyer’s daughter birthed a stillborn. The rate and scale of “incidents” in Paradise Springs tripled by the quarter. The people started to whisper.

“What’s going on, Raidine?” Birdie asked nervously. But Raidine just kept on threading seashells and humming a wordless tune.

When that swamp girl disappeared, Henry and Birdie breathed a sigh of relief. The way they saw it, they had done what they could. But no one should be expected to be all things to all people. Rumors spread about Raidine living in the mangroves, chewing on cattails and making small talk with the cottonmouths. The janitor was the only one who knew the truth, but he couldn’t bring himself to tattle. She gave him leaves to soothe his aching back.

Before long, people forgot about the strange girl with the cool, wet beauty. But once in a while, on a foggy morning, the dew would thicken the starchy grass, and

Henry would remember his first wife with fondness—the way she brought him to life.

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Raidine came home on Easter. The pageant was scheduled for six o'clock. Mr. Leon was sick with scarlet fever, but the nieces made a halfhearted attempt at potato salad anyway because tradition is important. The whole town packed up their best sherry in tin thermoses and headed in a throng to the water's edge. Birdie sat in the front row, balancing a bag of freshly washed grapes on her ripening belly. They planned to name the child Elvis.

Henry was the man of the hour, and it was nearly time to shine. He was backstage, applying clumps of mascara to his eyebrows because, "Jesus was Mediterranean." He was draped in long, white robes. He had practiced the part of dying all week long—sticking his tongue out and bulging out his eyes like a goldfish. It was the role of a lifetime.

Raidine walked in, naked as sin.

"Jesus?" she gasped, and her eyes looked like clouds brewing heat.

Henry froze in place, jaw gaping. He stuttered a string of words that meant nothing at all. They never had.

"Jesus," she said tenderly. She pressed a hand to his cheek. It smelled like heaven, smelled like a womb. "Jesus," she said again, remembering everything. Leaving

nothing out. “Oh, I’ve been waiting for you for so, so long.”

She leaned in for a kiss and gave him everything she had.

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The dead don’t rest easy in the marsh, so they buried that man on a worn-down hill. Henry always said he wanted to be buried with his horse, but the thing about Henry was he didn’t have a horse. So Birdie cut off her ponytail and laid it on his chest.

On the day of the funeral, someone snapped a picture. “For the paper,” they said. But no paper would print about a dead Jesus. Bad for business.

After everybody left, Birdie lay down on the side of the hill and waited. Sweat soaked through her black satin dress. The gold on her finger grew slippery. Hours may have passed, but time does not move in the swamp like it does elsewhere. The cicadas hummed, the bullfrogs croaked, and the kingfisher lulled Birdie into a fitful sleep.

It was there, somewhere in the space between dreams and waking, that Birdie heard the sound of singing.

*Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me. Yes, Jesus loves me! The Bible tells me so.*

“Raidine?” she whispered, and a tear rolled down her cheek. So strange how saltwater is made by the body. So strange we pretend to understand why.

She knew what was next. This time, she did not struggle. She did not scream. The sound of splashing came from everywhere. A small, delicate hand pressed into her chest.

Birdie closed her eyes, opened her mouth, and prayed for a drink.

## Swamp Girl

Nouvelle

2024

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Short Story

2024

Cette oeuvre est une nouvelle fictive inspirée du conte de fée *Undine* publié en 1811 par l'écrivain romantique allemand Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué. Dans le conte original, *Undine* (Ondine), un esprit aquatique, épouse un chevalier afin d'obtenir une âme. Hans Christian Anderson a déclaré que ce conte a été l'inspiration pour écrire *La petite sirène*. Ma libre adaptation du conte original se déroule dans la Floride du milieu de 20e siècle et examine les thèmes de la passivité féminine, de la sexualité, de la religion et de la spiritualité.

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This piece is a fictional short story based on the fairy tale novella *Undine* published by German romantic writer Friedrich de la Motte Fouqué in 1811. In the original story, a water spirit marries a knight in order to gain a soul. Hans Christian Anderson credited the tale as his inspiration for writing *The Little Mermaid*. My loose rendition set in mid-20th century Florida, explores the murky intersection of gender, sexuality, religion, and spirituality.

## **Kelsey Yandura**

Kelsey Yandura est une journaliste, écrivaine créative et étudiante diplômée au département du folklore à l'Université Memorial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador. Elle a obtenu un diplôme en rédaction professionnelle à l'université Baylor en 2014 et a passé les dix années suivantes tant que rédactrice, éditrice et journaliste indépendante en Colorado et à New York, travaillant dans la presse écrite, numérique et audiovisuelle. Son travail créatif couvre différentes formes et genres, même si elle revient toujours à la fiction inspirée des contes populaires et des contes de fées. Dans ses recherches universitaires, elle explore la religion vernaculaire et l'expression spirituel, en particulier entre les femmes qui ont quitté les communautés religieuses fondamentalistes. À ce jour, elle soutient que le meilleur repas qu'elle a jamais mangé était une tranche de pizza d'un 7/11 près de Steamboat Springs, dans le Colorado.

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Kelsey Yandura is a journalist, creative writer, and graduate student in Folklore at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador. She earned a degree in Professional Writing from Baylor University in 2014 and spent the following decade as a freelance writer, editor, and journalist in Colorado and New York, working across print, digital, and broadcast media. Her creative work spans forms and genres, though she always finds herself returning to fiction rooted in folk and fairy tales. In her graduate research, she explores vernacular religion and creative spiritual expression, particularly among women who have left fundamentalist religious communities. To this day, she

maintains that the best meal she's ever had was a slice of pizza from a 7/11 outside Steamboat Springs, Colorado.