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The Exploration of Various Literary Genres through Short Story Writing

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The Exploration of Literary Genre through Short Story Writing

This project seeks to explore the idea of literary genre, and to that end is a miscellany of narratives in the forms of various sub-genres. I seek to understand better the range of storytelling. In the process, I shall seek to improve the quality of my writing sentence to sentence. In other words, while acquiring a more sophisticated understanding of narrative types, I'll seek to hone my general composition skills.

Touch-Me-Nots

In the hospital, the nurses suggested running ice cubes up and down her arms, squeezing a ball of Play-Doh, or scribbling on paper with pen. *Keep your hands busy when you feel the urges*, they said.

So back at home, she picked up gardening. One trip to Home Depot and YouTube tutorial later, she placed russet-colored seeds in dirt packeted pockets, sprinkled a layer of soil, and misted until her thumb began to cramp.

Now what? she wondered. In a little while, wispy roots would split the seed's shells. Later, pale green stems would startle the soil, shooting upwards up to 5 feet.

She imagined tearing off the Saran Wrap and poking her fingers into the dirt as if to feel each micro growth, but there's a risk in getting too close. Even a slight touch of one of the green pods could result in an "explosion" of seeds. While there's satisfaction in yanking a root, ripping a leaf, or pressing a thumb into a petal or fruit to make it bruise, she resisted this time.

Instead, she imagined the fruits of her labor---fuchsia, peach, and silvery white blossoms whose velvet petals she could gently rub between fingertips.

In time, she'd learn the satisfaction of growing something by leaving it alone. But until then, she'd keep trying.

The Bear and the Ant

A Bear roaming the forest found a hive tucked into the hollow of an oak. He grabbed the honeyed nest and ran through the woods, past the clover patch, through the stream, over the fallen tree, and into his cave.

Safe from the swarm, he said, "I will save my treat for tomorrow." The Bear kept his untouched honey in the darkest corner of his cave.

Soon tomorrow turned into the next day and the next.

One day, an Ant found a drop of honey near a great oak. He followed the drops through the dense woods, past the clover patch, over the stream, over the fallen tree, and into the Bear's cave. "Why look!" said the Ant. "Here's the whole nest! This would feed my friends for months."

That night, while the Bear slept, the Ant and his friends carried the hive out of the cave. When the Bear awoke, he cried, seeing the sticky nest was gone. "If only I had taken a piece while I could!" the Bear said.

And so, the Bear went on the same as before, for with or without honey, he never got a taste.

It is wiser to savor a bit each day than save everything for an unpromised someday

Walpurga Hausmännin

I

Blood sprouts against the woman's white nightgown, fanning across fabric lines like a red fern. Her purple lips quiver as her chest heaves, preparing for the next contraction. Heavy canopy curtains catch most of her cries, but the uncaught reverberations cascade from the wooden window and into small-town Dillingen, Germany's still streets of 1587.

The woman sighs. A moment of stillness between contractions. Her eyes float around the room, pausing on creases of curtain and specks of dust on the wooden bed frame. She trembles, half aware of the impending task before her and half expecting to fade into death.

Walpurga Hausmännin swings her achy hips off the bed and hobbles to the kitchen to mix a calming tea. Though God cursed Eve with the pain of labor, she believes He mercifully raised up midwifery and herbalism to reduce the anxieties and pain of childbirth. Certainly, the God who set a protective mark on Cain did not wish the Church to outlaw herbs that ease a woman's anguish?

Returning to the chamber, Heinrich Witz, husband to the straining mother, blocks her path.

"Is it a boy?" Heinrich grasps Walpurga's sleeve, nearly tipping the tiny cup out of her hand. Walpurga sneers at the man. Too many husbands lurk outside their wives' bed chambers, desperate for the cries of a baby boy, hardened to the cries of their own wife.

"Perhaps consider asking once you hear the cries of a child." Walpurga tosses a bony elbow into the man's rib cage, and he moves aside.

Katheryn Witz breathes heavily, golden curls slathered to her brow, marbled neck painted with blue veins covered in a lacy layer of sweat. The poor woman has been in labor for nearly two days, unable to eat or sleep between contractions. “Drink this, Katheryn. It will ease your pain.” Katheryn leans forwards to sip the tea, but another contraction pulls her head forward and knocks the cup onto the quilt.

A week ago, during Walpurga’s final visit before the birth, Katheryn shared her excitement over her new, rocking cradle. She fawned over the cherry wood, brushing her fingertips between the lattice finishing and knobbed legs. She wondered aloud whether the child would have its father’s square jaw or her bright, blue eyes. But between her playful musings, she shared her worry with Walpurga.

“I pray to God it’s a son,” she said. “Then I won’t have to worry if I have a girl in the future. The son’s role will already be filled.”

Now, Walpurga wonders if there will be a child at all; a wine-stained head crowns between the mother’s quaking thighs, each pulse gushing dark blood. Katheryn grows paler, white nightgown and neckline blending into one shade of ivory.

“I’m losing the baby, aren’t I,” Katheryn whispers. Walpurga cups Katheryn’s quivering cheeks.

“You are doing nothing wrong. Only a little bit to go now.” But Katheryn’s cries grow more feeble. When the head appears, Walpurga fears the red cast of blood masks a grey skull. A few pushes later, and Walpurga takes her hand to assist the baby through the canal; a ridged, rubbery cord clings to the child’s neck; it constricts with each contraction, and Walpurga barely slides it over the head before a stone-like creature emerges from the woman’s womb.

The child is dead.

Heinrich bursts into the bedchamber and stares at the baby and barely conscious wife. “Why doesn’t it cry,” he bellows. Walpurga ignores him, wrapping the child in cloth. “Why don’t you do something?” Heinrich yanks the child from Walpurga, uncovering its body. His face contorts, eyebrows furrowing and eyes protruding like a toad. “My son, my son is dead.” Heinrich drops the baby onto the bed. Fingers outstretched, he backs out of the room.

Walpurga rushes to pick up the child. She wraps the body in a tight swaddle and places it in the cradle. What a sight; a grey stone sitting in a vibrant, cherry cradle like a solidified ghost trapped in a painted tomb.

Outside, Walpurga eyes Heinrich stomping off into the field.

One year ago, Walpurga considered that Heinrich may have changed; watching sweet Katheryn and Heinrich marry, rose lips against his rough chin, the sight would have convinced anyone Heinrich’s temper had softened. But now, Walpurga despises herself for ever believing he would change. She should have known his bat screech of life and vibrant red skin paralleled a dark temper. Any peace he showed then was merely a facade to capture a pure, oblivious bride.

Throughout Katheryn’s pregnancy during Walpurga’s visits, he constantly ordered Walpurga around like a maid. He asked Walpurga to sweep the kitchen after making a cup of tea or scrub the bedroom floor after performing a checkup. He berated signs of clumsiness and ache that comes with age. He warned, “If you drop my son, Walpurga, I’ll drop you on your head.” Most would take this as a mere jest, but Walpurga knew better than to trust the man’s talk for anything other than a serious threat.

Last year, when 4 of his cattle mysteriously died, Heinrich had grabbed Mrs. Nelson, a new neighbor, in the middle of a hymn, accusing her of spelling his livestock to death. With the eyes of the town on Mrs. Nelson's back, a week later, she and her husband vanished.

Walpurga turns her attention to Katheryn, who stares like a cat at some otherworldly spirit.

"Katheryn, my dear, can you hear me?" Katheryn's chest heaves, barring each breath with the ghost of labor pains. "Katheryn, you've lost quite a bit of blood, but you'll make it if you take rest and eat well." Katheryn turns slightly to Walpurga's voice, eyes glassy. "I wish to die," Kathern whispers, "but I will not." Walpurga kisses the girl's forehead.

"You have the resilience of your mother. After she birthed her second still-born son, she prayed to God for strength to carry one more. One year later, she birthed the most beautiful baby girl." Walpurga brushes a curl behind Katheryn's ear. "And you, my dear, gave your mother more joy than ten sons combined. Your mother prized and cherished you from the day you entered this world. You gave your family the sunshine fathers mistakenly believe only comes from a son." Katheryn's shaking breath cast clinging tears off her lips.

"But you, Katheryn, are more than mere sunshine; you are the sun. And like the sun, you will remain resilient even in dark times like these, which nearly every mother faces. You will rise once again, and with you, another child, as strong and beautiful as its mother."

Katheryn's neck pulses, fingers clawing into her palm.

"Oh dear, don't hurt yourself." Walpurga grasps Katheryn's hand, attempting to smooth out her palm.

But Katheryn resists, pulling her arm close to her side and staring into Walpurga's deep eyes with renewed intensity. "I pray to God I will not die," she stammers, "before I see your

body charred with tongues of fire and sent to Hell.” Katheryn grips the bedsheets, her strained voice spitting hot coals into Walpurga’s ears. “What will you use my child’s blood for, witch? Will you drain his vein and drink his youth for your own? What demon whispered, ‘this woman shall be your ingredient procurer,’ that you had no thought for mercy towards a young, God-fearing woman?” Katheryn leans back, aware of a strange pressure growing in her abdomen. “Did you allow my mother to birth me only to steal the fruit of my-” Katheryn moans, gripping the bed. Her blue eyes burn violently. “Are you cursing me now?”

“It’s time for the after-birth,” Walpurga calmly reassures her. “Hold on now, there isn’t much longer till this will all be over.”

Walpurga tries to focus on aiding the afterbirth, but Katheryn’s words draw out her own blood, leaving her weak and nauseous. If a woman cannot accept a still-birth without pointing fingers at the very woman helping to bring her child into the world, perhaps that woman should not hold a baby at all. For the sake of midwives everywhere, blindfolding pregnant women and pulling straws for the attending midwife should be common practice; this would disable the mother’s ability to accuse every good, Catholic woman of witchcraft whenever the Lord’s favor fails to fall upon a new baby.

Placenta out, Katheryn sinks her curls, crusted with blood and tears, back into the pillow. Walpurga cleans the bed and washes the stained blood off Katheryn’s thighs and abdomen.

“Tomorrow, I will help you take a hot bath. But tonight, you need rest. I will tell Heinrich to watch over you and fetch me if anything arises.”

Katheryn turns away, shutting her eyes and swallowing her sobs until the old woman’s steps fade out the door.

II

Walpurga trudges home, following the pebbled, town path for about a mile before she finally approaches her thatched home on the outskirts of town. The hipped gable roof blends into the blue-black night, and an observant viewer makes out a carved, horses' head atop the gale.

A desolate farmyard surrounds the home; before Walpurga's husband died, he cared for the land, tending horses, cattle, pigs, chickens, and a few crops, but now, with him gone and Walpurga's stamina for land and animal caring diminished with age, only a few pigs and chickens remain.

Inside, Walpurga walks straight into the flett, her open kitchen dining area taking up the width of the back of the house. The cauldron, waving above the fireplace covered with field stones, attaches to a wooden frame decorated by horse-heads. Starting the fire, Walpurga adds lard to the water in the cauldron, allowing it to dissolve. Then, she gathers flour and leaves a hole in the white mound to pour the now concentrated water into the well. She waits for the steaming mixture to cool enough for her to knead and spread the dough thin with her hands. Placing the pastry in a bowl, she pours in a mixture of leftover meat, apples, eggs, and pepper. With a humble pie now over the fire, she sits back in her twine chair, watching the smoke rise and drift out of the owl-hole opening in the roof.

But instead of passing time reminiscing autumn evenings with her husband, an unwanted face, carved from smoke and the smell of Heathen pie, spits accusations in her wake: "*You stole my son, witch.*" A deformed child emerges from the smoke, grabbing Walpurga's throat with unexplainable strength.

“You stole my soul, witch,” emerges a deep, earthy voice from the demonic child.

Walpurga tries to yank the creature off her throat, but its hands shift into claws. Ebony nails trace the bumps of her trachea, and a gaping mouth reveals a forked, black tongue.

Walpurga cannot make a sound. The demon stares into her eyes, its own eyes smoke like coal taken from the banks of a lava lake. Slowly, it bends its neck towards Walpurga’s throat, and sharp pain, like taking a hanging piece of flesh from your nail bed and stretching it across your body, is now concentrated between her chest to her chin. The demon raises its head, its tongue dripping a stream of fresh blood.

Walpurga wakes with a gasp. Her throat burns with the inhalation of smoke, and she rises quickly to take the pie off the fire. But it’s too late. The crust crumbles into dark flakes, and the pie’s face bubbles black. Groaning, Walpurga tosses the pie into the pig trough. Too tired to fathom laboring over another pie, she heads to her bed, sitting on the unforgiving mattress.

Before last year, Walpurga never lost newborns at such high rates. The town’s women loved her, the men respected her, and everyone cared for her after her husband’s death, bringing food and company. But, ever since the first stillborn last Winter, it’s as though death never left her hands. As one of the town’s only midwives, however, they had no choice but to assume each death couldn’t be helped.

But after tonight, Walpurga fears the town will turn, just like Katheryn, once so forgiving and docile, and accuse her unimaginable crimes.

“Lord, wash my hands of this curse. If I sinned, let me face the consequences, not these poor mothers and their unborn children.” Outside, a quiet breeze brushes past the trees and over Walpurga’s quivering hands. “Lord, I do not wish death upon anyone.” A hand seems to brush Walpurga’s shoulder. Walpurga bows her head but stares wide-eyed at the spot of moonlit hitting

the corner of her bed-chamber. “Holy Virgin Mary, help me in my case for cleanliness. Beg for my redemption to our Lord. Do not let me die in the wallow of stillborn children and mother’s tears.”

An unnatural calm rushes over Walpurga; she stares at the now darkened corner like a prophet at an impending storm, accepting of its wrath yet thankful for its merciful cleansing of a wicked land. She allows the supernatural calm to set her body into a trance, her spirit hovering above her body.

As sleep transcends, a brief attack shatters her state of numb acceptance; she’s in the kitchen again, trying to save the pie from burning, but inevitably, it does. As she takes the pie off the fire, something catches her eye. Bending closer, the pie’s face does not only bubble, but shifts, morphing into two bulging eyes, an aquiline nose, pressed lips, and sharp chin. A face like that of a demon before being pitched into the fire for all eternity. Her face.

“Search her house as thoroughly as possible! Do not leave any holes, corners, or chests untouched!” Walpurga wakes, startled at the sound of loud boots rumbling through the house. A man bursts into her room, and she, with great effort, sits up. “Remove your clothing.” Walpurga’s eyes squint from the morning light. Clearing her throat, she croaks,

“Sir, the only man who’s seen me unclothed is my now-deceased husband. I intend to keep it that way.” The man’s eyes harden.

“You lost the privilege of modesty when you were accused of witchcraft.” Walpurga’s eyes widen.

“Witchcraft? I am an honest, Catholic woman.”

“That’s not what the Witzs say. And many others for that matter.” Walpurga stares at her hands, in such shock, she starts counting her age spots, hoping to realize she’s in another dream.

“Do you think I wish to see you naked?” He booms.

“I will not undress for the likes of you or any man.” With a growl, the man lunges at her, grabbing the neckline of her nightgown and ripping the thin sheet off her body. Walpurga whimpers knocked onto the floor and her head under the bedframe. The man lifts each of her legs so high, she fears her hamstrings will snap. He lifts her sagging chest, letting them slap back onto her sternum before flipping her over and examining her back. Sharp pricks poke her skin, causing Walpurga to cry out in pain. Finally, after a good minute of examining and poking, he throws the bed’s blanket over her.

“Get up. You’re covered in moles and warts. You have a strange scar behind your neck. These are all signs of visible witch marks.” Walpurga stares at him in confusion.

“All people have marks. Even you have a scar right on your left cheek. Are you a practitioner of witchcraft?”

“Silence, devil worshipper! A visible scar clues to the depravity of the soul when stabbed with a sharp point.” The man withdraws his sheath, revealing a silver encrusted dagger stained with blood. He raises it to his cheek and grimaces as he draws the blade across his scar. “Look you beast. I am no witch. The blood runs freely, and I am not numb to the blade’s pain.”

“Did I not bleed and cry in pain?” Walpurga groans, putting her hand on her bed frame and hoisting herself to standing. The blanket grips to her back, sticking to blood spots like a loose-fitting bandage. “Or are you blind to the wounds of an old woman?”

“The test was necessary. The absence of blood is an infallible sign of a witch, as well as the absence of pain. Perhaps, no imp has been sucking on you to enable the exchange of power, or, perhaps your marks are invisible.” His eyes scan Walpurga’s body, though wrapped in a blanket, as though he could see through the thin fibers. “You will wish you had not bled woman. You could have escaped torture and met your fate at the stake this afternoon. But now, you have set yourself on a path more painful than death. All to confirm the undeniable truth of your treachery.”

Walpurga shakes, pulling the blanket tightly around her body and turning towards the window. She looks at a scrawny raven, perched on a twisted branch and tilting its head curiously at her stare. Metallic jangles cause Walpurga to jump, and the raven flies off. “Was that your imp, disappointed to find his witch busy,” the man laughs drily.

“Who are you,” she trembles as tight metal clasps strain her wrist.

“Who am I?” The man suddenly grabs Walpurga’s chin, digging his sharp nail under her jaw. “I am, Clawes Sprenger, the Witch Hunter. Not only of witches but their secrets. And I intend to discover yours, even if I have to drag you to your grave’s brink and back a thousand times before the truth finally bubbles out of your cauldron of lies.”

Walpurga’s eyes grow grey; she is already condemned. This witch hunter is a facade of a justice system, as though he would offer her anything other than the opportunity to confirm his suspicions. Even if she proved herself innocent a thousand times, her fate ends at the stake.

For three days, Walpurga sits strapped to a chair, naked, and under close watch, for her imp to show itself. Although Clawes commands the guards to keep a close watch for ravens, no animals approach the jail. At the start, Clawes offers her some bread and water, in hopes it would encourage her to talk. But Walpurga refuses to deny her innocence, and Clawes grows impatient.

“It’s time to try tormentum insomniae,” Clawes tells his guards. With their new instructions, the guards untie Walpurga and prod her with spears, forcing her to walk around her cell back and forth for two days straight. Blisters grow on her soles, and eventually, she breaks down and refuses to walk any further, even with the fear of the guard’s punishment. Rather than allow the woman to rest, they simply strap her back in her chair and force an iron collar with a sharp depressor into her mouth. Once again, sleep is stolen from Walpurga, and in combination with starvation, she succumbs to delusions.

After 4 days in jail and continuous torture, Clawes returned to the cell.

“My dear Walpurga.” He sits under her feet, taking an ointment and rubbing it gently into her blisters. “The power to end this torture is on your tongue. Simply confess the truth, we’ll release you.” Walpurga raises her head of matted grey hair. Her eyes waver pleadingly into Clawes’, and he examines her mouth. Crusted blood outlines her lips and her jaw muscles spasm. “Would you like me to take the collar off?” Walpurga gives a small cry, tears bursting from her sockets.

After Clawes removes the device, Walpurga spends a few moments rubbing her jaw. In its extended position, it locked open. But after a few minutes, it shuts tight again.

“Walpurga, you can make this all end with a simple confession of the truth.” She looks up at him, as though trying to remember who he is. “Why don’t we start from the beginning. Tell me, when did you begin practicing witchcraft?”

For a minute, Walpurga twists her head wildly around her cell, scanning the walls and cracks, searching for something, anything to save her from this destiny. But there is nothing. Except for the witch hunter, extending some solace of reduced judgment for the price of confession. For the price of her soul.

“Perhaps some water will help loosen your lips.” Clawes barks at one of his guards, who promptly returns with a cup. He stands, taking the cup and pouring it slowly into Walpurga’s ready mouth. Like a dog, Walpurga gulps down the liquid, letting it greedily run over her neck and down her body. It drips in between her thighs, and Walpurga rubs her legs together, allowing the water to unstick her legs from her stale urine.

“Now, tell me Walpurga, when did you start practicing witchcraft?” Walpurga lifts her head and stares directly into Clawes’ gentle guise.

“Whether I tell you anything or not, will you not condemn me to the same fate?” Her voice sounds unfamiliar, old, and strained beyond her age, as though 4 days here took 20 years of life.

“No, Walpurga. I’m willing to make an exception for you.” Walpurga stares at Clawes.

“Walpurga, there have been many witches, worse than you I assume, who have been allowed to live their lives post-trial. They were punished, of course, but sentenced to exile rather than death.” He pauses, examining Walpurga’s reaction. “These witches are rare, as this mercy requires something most witches cannot give: honesty.” Walpurga drops her gaze. “Yes, Walpurga, honesty about every sin you’ve ever committed. Every child you’ve ever murdered. Every crop you’ve cursed to blight. Everything.” Walpurga closes her eyes and mutters under her breath.

“Speak up!” Clawes bolts up in fury. “Are you cursing me now, even as I offer you escape from the stake?” A gentle rise of Walpurga’s solemn face answers his question.

“No, Clawes. I am praying.” Shaking hands, attempting to fold together while bound by rope, reflect her truthfulness. “I am praying for forgiveness.”

Clawes’ shoulders drop and he breathes deeply. “Understandable. You’ll need God’s mercy most of all if you wish to escape the second death.” He turns to the hallway, whispers to the outside guard, who scampers off, and pulls a chair into the cell. Face to face with Walpurga, he calmly whispers, “The more you tell me, the wilder your crimes, the more likely I’ll believe you honest and non deserving of death. After all,” he sighs, “women have fallen victim to the Serpent’s lies since Eve in the Garden, and it’s not your fault you were born with a womanly weakness for sin.” He pauses, then bends over Walpurga’s tied body, cupping her cheeks in his rough hands and whipping her tears with his thumbs. “You begin the process of redemption through confession, sweet Walpurga.” Her grey eyes plead, gripping his black eyes with cautious hope. “Now, Walpurga, tell me. Are you a witch?” She glances down.

“Yes.” He lets her go.

“Let’s make you pure again.”

Clawes leaves for an hour or so, tending to other matters before finally returning by nightfall. Inside the cell, Walpurga lifts her head at the sound of two pairs of feet.

“I brought a guest with me, Walpurga,” Clawes says. “I figure we can make your case go by swiftly if I bring a judge to your cell.”

“Yes, I think I can expedite things with an honest, thorough confession.” Walpurga’s throat dries. When the two men finally approach her side, she nearly throws up; Heinrich Witz stands beside Clawes, his dark eyes smiling maliciously. “Now, Walpurga, I know what you’re thinking, but don’t worry. As a judge, am I am held to a standard of impartiality. Regardless of your crime against me, I will not let its emotional ties ruin my standard for unbiased justice.”

“Did you not accuse me of witchcraft in the first place?” Heinrich laughs. “My accusations are hardly related to my behavior in court. Besides, I hear the Witch Catcher and you have made a deal. Honest confession, no matter how villainous, in return for exile.” Walpurga eyes Heinrich but nods slightly. “Well then, the matter is settled.” Heinrich snags a chair and sits. Clawes leans against the corner of the cell. “Let’s begin, shall we?” Walpurga swallows. “Tell me, when did you begin to stray from the Catholic Church?”

“When my husband died,” she begins, “I was lonely. So heart-wrenchingly lonely. I fell away from my faith and into my desires for companionship.” She turns her left cheek, as though attempting to hide a blush like a young schoolgirl.

“Tell me about your companion,” Heinrich urges.

“Well, I met him while cutting corn for my neighbor Hans Schlumperger. I needed extra income, as not many women were in the birthing season. On his land, I met his former servant Bis im Pfarrhof. In the past, I would have prayed to the Lord to blind me to his handsomeness, but at that time, I hardly regarded the Lord. I’m ashamed to admit it now, but, back then, I enticed him with lewd speeches and gestures, eventually urging him to meet with me and indulge in lustful intercourse. But when the time came, and I sat waiting in my chamber and mediating on fleshly thoughts and desires, Bis im Pfarrhof appeared by my bed. Enraptured by his beauty, I committed an act of fornication. But, during the act, I felt a cloven hoof-cold and hard like wood.

His clothes and physique were of Pfarrhof's, but I knew at that moment it was an evil imposter with whom I slept with.

"I screamed the name of Jesus, and the demon fled. But the next night, he returned, and I could not resist temptation. He promised to help me in poverty and need if only I surrendered my body and soul. With an ebony claw, he scratched below my left shoulder, demanding I use my blood as the ink to sign away my soul. I told him I could not write, so he guided my hand across the parchment. I believe nothing offensive was written, only my name. When I signed, he took me on his pitchfork to meet a big man with a grey beard; he sat in a chair and was richly attired like a great prince. This was the Great Devil to whom I had promised my body and soul. He demanded my worship, so I knelt and honored him, though I did not know what word and in which fashion I prayed.

"Once, I pronounced the name of Jesus, suddenly aware of the dangerous predicament of my soul. The Great Devil struck my face, beating me until I renounced God in Heaven, the Christian name and belief, the blessed Saints and the Holy Sacraments, and the heavenly hosts and the whole of Christendom.

"Then, The Great Devil, satisfied with my renunciation, baptized me afresh, giving me the name Hofelin, and my paramour-demon, Federlin. After confirming my contract, The Great Devil invited me to drink wine, eat the unsalted roast of pigs and innocent babies, and commit fornication with Ferderlin.

"After surrendering myself to the Devil, I seemingly returned to the Catholic Church and received the Blessed Sacrament of the true Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, but this is a falsehood. I kept the Blessed Sacraments in my mouth until I reached home. Then, I delivered them to the Great Devil, where horrific blasphemies and rituals took place."

Heinrich sits up sharply. “You confess to offering the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ, to the Evil One, despoiling the Blessed Sacraments with these Black Masses?” Walpurga nods grimly.

“Walpurga, please continue. Your brave confession is duly noted,” Clawes encourages.

“At the command of my whoremonger, I often dishonored the Holy Water for Baptism, emptying it before my house or destroying it just the same.” She pauses, before continuing, “a few days before I was cast into prison, I took a holy water stoup to carry home. Then, Ferderlin, dressed in handsome garments, encountered me in the little street between the great cloister and the stable of Martin Muller. He forced me to hurl the holy water against the wall and dishonor the Blessed Mother of God, the Holy Virgin Mary saying, ‘Shame, thou ugly hussy!’

“But before that, Ferderlin came to me in many places to fornicate, even in the street at night. But before long, Ferderlin presented me with a salve in a little box, which he told me to use to injure people, animals, and even the fruit of the field. I used this salve on many new-born, most died either immediately or in due time.

“Who did you use the salve upon?” Heinrich injects.

“The first was Anna Hamannin, who lived not far from Durstigel. I rubbed the salve on both her and her firstborn, and they died together.” Walpurga goes on, describing many deaths from the salve in great detail. “There was a time when I was unable to smear the salve on a child: the small boy of Georg Klinger. I encountered too many people and was unable to do so. My salve also proved ineffective once, on the wife of the Governor; her neck ornament with blessed medals prevented the salve from working-”

“Did you use the salve on my son!” Heinrich yells. Walpurga, startled, jumps in her chair, causing her chains to pinch her wrists and bleed. Clawes stands straight, placing a hand on Heinrich’s shoulder.

“Heinrich,” Clawes starts softly,

“Did you use the salve-” Clawes yanks Heinrich from his chair, dragging him outside the cell. “-on my son!” His voice breaks into sobs, booming through the prison corridor as though he were attempting to quiet a crowd in court. Finally, a door closes, and Clawes returns.

“I apologize, Walpurga. I promised a calm, non-condemning place for confession.” Repositioning the chair, he sits. “I sense you have told most of the truth, but you are still hiding more. Reveal all, and I will set you free.” Walpurga raises her head. Her hollow cheeks spread across her yellow teeth in a sick smile.

“If I do not confess, I will die.” She glances upward and out the window, noticing a raven sitting on a branch outside the cell. “If I do confess, I will die.” A strange, gurgling laugh creeps from her throat. She seizes, arms moving violently against her blood dripping chains, and spits into Clawes beard.

Backing away, Clawes stares wide-eyed; the old woman dances like a bird caught in a metal trap, thrashing violently as though willing to tare its wings from its sockets to escape the cage. “You are no witch-catcher!” Walpurga screams. “You are a witch-maker!” Trills of delirious laughter shoot from the window, covering the town in an old woman’s screams.

But the next day, when Clawes asked the townspeople if they heard the woman’s cries, only a few mentioned a noise: an odd, shrill shriek of a midnight raven.

“Come, my Katheryn, it’s time to watch a witch burn.” Heinrich grabs Katheryn’s arm as they exit their home, entering the flooded streets anticipating the afternoon event. It’s a warm, September afternoon, but Katheryn pulls her shall tight with her free hand.

“Katheryn!” Elsebeth, Katheryn’s neighbor, pulls her from Heinrich’s grasp. “It is true this is the midwife who murdered your son?” Katheryn’s cheeks flush, and she slightly elbows Elsebeth’s rib cage.

“Elsebeth, I do not wish to discuss my son’s death.” Elsebeth frowns.

“If there’s any occasion suitable to discuss your son’s death, is it not at the burning of his murderer?” Katheryn groans softly, attempting to beckon her husband’s company with her eyes. “I heard Walpurga confessed to a long list of maleficia, mostly related to her profession as a midwife.” Elsebeth stares earnestly at Katheryn. “In twelve years, she killed forty-one infants and two mothers in labor. That could have been you, Katheryn!” Katheryn stares forward. “I heard she used the blood, bones, and hair of children for sorcery, and then ate their bodies. Did you check to make sure your son is still buried? Walpurga could have asked her demon friend to bring your son to make up for the quaint prison rations.” She pauses, as though discovering a great secret. “It’s no wonder she didn’t die sooner. I mean, she never made much to live on in our small town. Women can only give birth so many times. And with her husband dead, no one could prevent her from falling into the hands of wickedness. I suppose the flesh of dead children and drink of blood tastes better than dust to a poor, depraved woman. Perhaps, she ate my brother, Ghert, back when-”

Gasps emerge from the front of the crowd. Elsebeth, linking arms with Katheryn, shoves to the front. Outside the town hall, a hunched Walpurga drags her chains, her face misshapen,

and skin covered with purple patches. Her eyes drift dreamily along with the crowd, head wobbling with each turn.

A broad-shouldered man, who Katheryn recognizes as Clawes, ties Walpurga to a stake sitting on a wooden cart. Clawes turns to the crowd after securing Walpurga, and yells, “Attention, townsfolk! The Judges and Jury of the Court of this Town of Dillingen, by virtue of the Imperial and Royal Prerogative and Rights of His Right Reverence, Herr Marquard, Bishop of Augsburg, and Provost of the Cathedral, our most gracious Prince and Lord, at last unanimously gave the verdict that the aforesaid Walpurga Hausannin be punished and dispatched from life to death by burning at the stake as being a maleficent and well-known witch and sorceress, convicted according to the context of Common Law and the Criminal Code of the Emperor Charles V and the Holy Roman-”

Rustling feet turn to random outbursts and, finally, roars of righteousness. “Burn the witch! Burn the witch!” The crowd bellows in unison. Finally, Clawes gives up his speech, and, grabbing the cart’s handle, begins driving it towards the execution site. But the crowd swarms the cart, men with red-hot irons driving them into Walpurga’s left breast and right arm. Katheryn winces at Walpurga’s weak cries.

The cart edges on, only to stop once more at the lower gate. Walpurga’s right breast meets the red-hot iron this time. At the third stop, at the mill brook outside the hospital gate, a man presses a red-hot iron into her left arm.

At the execution site, the red-hot iron meets her left hand. Clawes begins to lit the fire, when Elsebeth yells, “Can you burn a pledged midwife of Dillingen, who has acted so vilely, with her right hand, the same hand used for the midwifery oath, still attached?” Heinrich, now beside Clawes, responds,

“No, woman! Your words ring with wisdom. Let’s cut it off to warn future and practicing midwives that this oath shall not be broken under God without cost!” The crowd roars in approval, and Clawes drags out an ax from under the cart. With a swift rise and fall, Walpurga’s right-hand plops into the wood under her stake. Her screams blend into the crowd’s cheers.

“Burn the witch! Burn the witch!” Katheryn, at the front, stares at Walpurga’s bowed head. This once virtuous woman, strong in courage and love, who cared for her in childbirth despite her accusations of witchcraft, is strapped to the stake from her accusation.

And now, Walpurga’s only remaining hope rests in the blood of her arm slowing the fire and allowing her to slip into quiet death.

The fire begins, spreading to Walpurga’s dress and molding it to her skin. Not a sound rises from Walpurga, even while her lips melt into a solid gag of flesh. Her face bubbles black, and her ears melt into her forehead.

Katheryn begins to sob, collapsing onto the dirt square, kneeling before Walpurga’s burning death. The crowd goes silent. “You feel sympathy for this witch?” Heinrich tries to yank Katheryn to standing, but she falls over. “The one who stole our son?” But Katheryn cannot stop her cries, the tears blocking the noise from her husband and ridicule from the crowd.

A breeze brushes Katheryn’s cheek, and she glances up. Walpurga’s blackened arms reach out towards Katheryn, and her eyes, red with smoke and gluing shut rapidly, beckon Katheryn forward.

Katheryn rushes forward, leaping into the cart and embracing the burning Walpurga before she turns to ash in her arms.

Remembering Her

10 Native American Women Who Changed History

“Remember who you are

woman,

it is the whole whole word”

- Joy Harjo (Native American – Creek) from *The Blanket Around Her*

1.

A shield to her people and sword by their side

Lozen was a warrior who could shoot and ride

Legends say the supernatural powers in her hands

Told her the place of US Calvary and Mexican army bands

Image: Lozen pointing towards the direction of the enemy, veins in her arms dark blue

2.

Sarah Winnemucca was a tribal leader and orator

Spending her life as an important educator

She was the first Native American woman with a published book

Which described Northern Paiute life and the lives white settlers took

Image: based on statue by Sculptor Benjamin Victor: Sarah Winnemucca wearing a dress with fringe and her stance imparting a sense of movement, her right hand holding a shellflower (the meaning of her Paiute name, Thocmetony) and in her left arm holding her book "Life Among the

Piutes: Their Wrongs and Claims"

3.

As a child, Susan La Flesche watched an Indian woman die

When a white doctor refused to tend to her bedside

Using this tragedy as her inspiration,

She became the first female Native American physician

Image: Susan La Flesche caring for Native American patients

4.

Lyda Conley stood before the Supreme Court and argued to protect

Her ancestral burial ground from urban development

She was the first female Native American lawyer, admitted to the Kansas Bar

She protected and saved her ancestors' graves and the ones unmarked

Image: Lyda in the Huron Indian Cemetery chasing away city officials disrespecting the graves
(she was arrested several times for interfering with city officials and "trespassing")

5.

Born on the Yankton reservation, Zitkála-Šá was taken

by white missionaries who preached Indigenous cultural erasement

She took to writing, using her English tongue to fight

for Native American culture and suffrage rights

Image: Zitkála-Šá's, half of her in her Indigenous clothing and the other half in white clothing, mirroring how she would choose to go back and forth with her style when giving speeches, with her mouth open the “wind” on the page pointing the viewer to a collage of her works around her, including the opera *The Sun Dance*, which was the first opera written by a Native American, titles of her autobiographical essays in *American Indian Stories*, *Old Indian Legends*, "Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians," etc.

6.

Mary Golda Ross was the first Native aerospace engineer,
Working from Skunk Works to the stars

A member of the Cherokee Nation,
She helped plan the early years of space exploration

Image: based on *Ad Astra per Astra* by Cherokee artist America Meredith with shows Mary Golda Ross in a red dress against a dark blue night sky with stars and skunk works space shuttle in the background

7.

When Elizabeth Peratrovich and her husband moved to Juneau,
A renter told them *sorry, but I can't rent to Native Alaskans like you*

So Elizabeth worked with others to draft America's first anti-discrimination bill
And presented it to the Alaska Territorial Legislature, which passed according to her will

Image: Elizabeth Peratrovich in front of mostly white and predominantly male legislators, saying
"I would not have expected that I, who am "barely out of savagery" would have to remind
gentlemen with five thousand years of recorded civilization behind them of our Bill of Rights.

8.

Although many asked her to change her last name
She refused and performed as Maria Tallchief on the stage

She became the first American to dance with the Paris Opera Ballet
Dancing in Nutcracker and Firebird as prima ballerina

Image: Maria Tallchief done by Robert Running Fisher Upham, "a mixed blood Indian from the
Fort Belknap Indian Reservation"

9.

Elouise P. Cobell grew up in a home without plumbing or electricity
And watched the American government drill Native lands to get money

Challenging the United States' mismanagement of trust funds
she advocated for more than 500,000 individual Native Americans

Image: Elouise in the stands during the class-action suit Cobell v. Salazar, maybe President Barack Obama signed the Claims Resolution Act (which was worth \$3.4 billion, the largest settlement in U.S. history)

10.

Suzan Shown Harjo founded The Morning Star Institute
Which protects sacred lands, tribal names, and music

She fought against the name of the Washington football team (the “Redskins”)
And helped recover more than one million acres for Native Americans

Image: portrait of Suzan Shown Harjo done by Leonard Peltier, an American Indian activist and militant member of the American Indian Movement

A Random Friday in November

In the middle of a Souza march, the principal's voice boomed over the loudspeaker: "Immediate Lockdown will now commence as a precaution to the missing shooter suspects spotted near Main Street and West McGillen Avenue." We abandoned the usual u-shape configuration of black chairs, tipping water bottles, clanging instruments, and bunching into a chaotic collage of squished shoulders.

I've always doubted the effectiveness of school lockdowns, as if hiding in a corner of the classroom, doors locked and windows covered convinces a shooter everyone decided to skip school.

I preferred Mrs. Gourd's strategy. She told us at the beginning of the school year, "if there's ever a shooter, I want you to throw everything you have at them, whether it's a chair, book, or vial of hydrochloric acid."

While Mrs. Gourd was the best teacher for that scenario, the Anatomy classroom was the ideal room. The door connected to the outside would allow us to bolt into the forest and use trees as shields. Then we could find a dumpster to crawl in and call our moms.

The band room was the worst. Tubas, French horns, trumpets, clarinets, music sheets, the baton, sat on curved rows of black chairs and black stands, unhidden. Unless the shooter believed everyone in the entire orchestra went to the bathroom at the same time, it seemed logical they could only be in one place: the band closet.

That's where we were, on a random Friday in November.

The closet was a kettle full of sweat and bodies. Some classmates curled into each other's laps, snickering at stomach sounds and throat gurgles uncovered by silence. Many texted their families and friends, the harsh light and shadows on their faces what I imagined Mary Shelley

looked like to her friends while telling *Frankenstein*. Others listened intently to the police radio through their phones, intrigued by the details pertaining to the chase:

Several shots were fired at the fleeing car. One suspect has escaped and police are in pursuit.

In the dark static, I recommitted my faith to God next to a boy playing *Trivia Crack*.

My phone vibrates. It's a picture of my friend's classmates pushing desks in front of the classroom door.

"The suspect is in the parking lot," someone whispered. My knees juttred into my sternum, and my spine pressed into the corner.

"Do they have a gun?" a tiny voice asked.

"They don't know."

The band door was the most convenient way to enter the school from the parking lot. Sometimes, late students came in for class that way, throwing their backpacks on the floor and quickly unpacking their instruments. The door was often unlocked.

Suddenly, the band closet door opens. For a split second, I wondered if my brains were about to be shot out of my head. But it was the teacher, and he slipped inside and locked the door.

After an hour and a half, we were given the clear. My chemistry friend and I found each other in the hallway, hopeful that after everything that we likely wouldn't be taking our test.

We entered the classroom, shocked to find our tests on the long black desks. The teacher played rain noises to "soothe" us, and a few people cried over their tests. Generously, she only gave us half the test and saved the other half for Monday. My friend and I looked up her

Facebook page later and spent a while staring and laughing sarcastically at her “Girls for Guns” t-shirt.

Later, we found out that the suspect did not have a gun, but that she had slipped into the building *with* the late students. She blended in so well, the teachers let her inside.

Unfortunately, I am not the only one of the family who has experienced trauma related to potential shooters or bombers. A 15-year-old student at my sister’s school was apprehended before setting a bomb off. She was in his first period. We tried to brush it off as a joke, half believing he wouldn’t have *actually* set off a bomb, despite police finding the makings of a bomb in his basement. Three years later, he opened fire on South Haven’s South Beach Pier, shooting and killing a 73-year-old man, wounding his 72-year-old wife, and killing himself. In the notebook in his backpack, he had written, *I don't feel anxious, nervous, excited, happy or sad. I feel absolutely nothing except content and acceptance.*

When I and others relay their experiences, they are often met with, “let's not get political.” It’s as though students who have encountered close calls or been in school shootings are expected to *feel absolutely nothing*.

This town and many alike, littered with quaint boutiques, old churches, overpriced grocery stores, a population considering gingers as “diversity,” offers homegrown shooters to its children and then wonders why some of them propose *outrageous* ideas like stricter gun control. On the other hand, some students don’t want gun control at all, but cannot bring up their experiences to their pro-gun friends without being accused of a “sheep” and using their stories for the “liberal agenda.”

Many if not most of the children at my high school are “pro-gun,” and that does not lessen their experience. Some kids played on their phones during the lockdown, the experience hitting them after the danger passed. Others felt the weight of possibility on their chests during and afterwards. Others didn’t feel anything negative or positive, while others found excitement in the change of the usual routine.

But we were all there, pro-gun or not, on that random Friday in November.