

Hansel and Gretel

By Cecily Parks

And on the second morning after she left her children in the woods, they called for her on FaceTime. She asked to see the far-off home in which they lived. They thrust the small glass screen around and often dropped it, so the house lurched and disturbed her stomach. There's the couch, the chair, they said. The stove and oven knobs. Please be careful, she said. Nibble, nibble, gnaw, they sang, showing her via phone the rough-hewn rafters and, for a dark pause, the carpet fibers. Rain, they said, and thrust the phone eye to the drops that spilled off the roof and through the pines but which the phone could not let her see. I wish I could see the rain, she said to her flushed-faced children, who were wearing pajamas far too warm for spring. Are you two hot? she asked. Nibble, nibble, gnaw, they sang, showing her two hard nests they'd built of blocks for the toy birds that warbled when squashed. Have you had breakfast yet? she asked. The children thought she meant the birds. Fat worms! they said, and accidentally pressed Mute. A pantomime of care progressed around the wooden nests in the house where, until two days ago, she'd lived with them. I'll be home soon, she said as the children threw foam packing peanuts at the birds. Who'd clean the crumbs the birds would never nibble? Who would feed her fire-cheeked children? Eventually the sound came back to their story, which wasn't one she thought she knew. The witch and mother now seemed fungible, a wooden home no safer than a cake one. What else, Mama?, they asked, clamoring big-faced on the cramping screen. Since she had nothing else, she watched her children grunt and scratch and bite each other, fighting over who would push the red button to end the call and make her disappear.



Little Mechanical Song

By Dean Young

This music box scares me but
it's probably nothing more
than the usual grinding rainbow machine,
the usual pirouette of skulls laughing
like the moon, crying like a sermonette
my friend says who also no longer
exists, at least not so we can split
a bottle of red. I myself make no claims
Wordsworth wouldn't about
a centralized self groping towards
transcendence in the reified night.
I'm all over the place and doubt
I'll ever be properly born. All music
after all is redundant meaning it won't end
without starting again. The depths
are above us.



In the Old Story

By Cecily Parks

In the old story
the girl clothed in red
carries sweet cakes wrapped
in rough cloth in her
basket. The wolfish
branches graze the soft
outsides of her thighs.
What the branches feel
is not so unlike
what she feels when she
thinks of the sweet cakes
wrapped in rough cloth
in her basket.

The story
tells me that girls carry sticks
woven into the shape
of a jaw. Or that wolves
should be killed. Or
that when my daughter
doesn't know the difference
between following and leaving
a trail, I will send her
loaded with sugar and fat
into the woods
that bend in the wind.



Masha Eventually

By Carrie Fountain

At first, I couldn't decide if I should call the bear it
or if I should call the bear him. At first, this distinction

was important to me, and because it was a problem
I could solve entirely within my own body, I worked on it

daily, like a chore, until everything inside me was arranged
in neat columns: pile of clean laundry, stack of clean dishes.

I'd gotten myself into this mess I could hear my grandmother
saying from her own reprehensible century. Now I'd pay the price

of my girlhood, as all women must. Okay, I thought, maybe
this is a rite of passage. I was, after all, a woman in the eyes

of the bear. And so in the eyes of the bear I tried to find
the moral of my story. But I never did. Too often I blacked out,

the pain and fear ripping through my woman's body,
exposing the girl's bones beneath, the girl's blood, upon which

the ships of this world had for so long been kept afloat. The sun
coming through the clean windows in the morning was still

sometimes enough to make me glow with happiness. But even that
became disgusting, eventually: that weakness in me, that beauty.

One evening I checked to see if the problem was solved. But found
I couldn't remember why I'd cared. The answer had slipped

from my grasp. One moment I was beating the rugs, coming to
a conclusion, the next I was washing the teapot, thinking of exactly

nothing. And that's when I knew it didn't matter. The bear was an it—
a dumb thing with needs and teeth, a thing into the hand of which

I could climb and from which I could stay hidden if it didn't find me
and eat me first, bone and blood, hair and clothing. I liked imagining

the look of wonder on my grandmother's face as she opened
the door to see me there, returned. I took my chances.



The Disaster

By Lisa Olstein

The disaster ruins everything.
There is no reaching the disaster
this way, the disaster threatens.
The disaster is separate, the disaster
does not come. We suspect the disaster
is thought. To think the disaster,
we are on the edge of disaster
already. When it comes upon us
the disaster is imminence: disaster
detached from the disaster. Time
belongs to the disaster. The disaster
has always already withdrawn,
there is no future for the disaster.
The disaster is perhaps related to
forgetfulness, the disaster not thought—
not knowledge of the disaster;
knowledge disastrously. The disaster
is perhaps passivity. Night, white
sleepless night, such is the disaster;
night lacking darkness, night separated
from star. The disaster exposes us
with respect to the disaster. Nothing
suffices. The disaster would liberate us
if it could. The disaster does not
impose itself. The disaster is not
our affair. The disaster takes care
of everything.



Whether the Goat is a Metaphor

By Jane Miller

We go on talking and digging a pit in the earth
to spit-roast kid,
since anyone working in a lively way is not attached
to the story.
In saving her, he saves himself.
It's getting late.
The story of the boy is that
by drinking water from a hoof, he's turned into a goat.
If we separate magic from life,
we get art. His sister, long story short,
gets thrown into a river with a stone around her neck.
His weeping stirs the neighbors with a silken net
to scoop her out. He turns three somersaults
of joy and lands on two feet as a boy again.
How, in heaven's name, will dinner be served, and when?
Separate art from life, we get nothing.
We go on talking and digging.
I've got a million and one things to do.
Of the multitude of things, it is emptiness
that's necessary now, now that you've had time
to wash and dress. As a form
of enlightenment, the most unsuspecting guest
may be your enemy in armor; or invisible,
who will clap you on the back
when you choke on a bone at the banquet.

