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The Gods Are Real

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**The gods are real**

but I believe in the power to make them up, and in the eventual need to wake all of us, if we are merely dreaming. The dark girl I was swarms up a pine, just ahead of a boy—brighter, younger—worth the years she’ll hang from like a cotton gallows god left to sip secrets from the gallows tree. When she hears one, she hears them all: Imagine a future where every man you love will break your body or your heart. You’ll still love them—it’s crucial to love what can consume you despite knowing what you know, but still,

The gods are real, she tells another lover, and nurses up a thread of bitter smoke from the navel of the spoon he must give her not to hate her. Eye to eye at an altar, there’s enough blood for two gods, but they can hardly bear the one they feed together—who can bear to see their brand so illuminated on another? Men and men and emptied bottles slip between the years ahead—she’ll drown in gods—she’ll fuck her way through what she thought they were, skull cracking on a floor like the stone left eye of a gallows king.
O god, the body breaking yields a doubled heart, wet as a molted cottonmouth, the husk still surging in a current of cold. The year of old animals—of oath and cure and relapse and brute love—splits the gods between us. They swim between us. They sip the slaughtered names, dole out scars, then gamble with seeds as white as weak light, having buried the body of a girl halved like a trickster’s war. The gods hang fruit on their gallows tree and reach up for my familiar heart. They want what’s left to ask for. They ask me to believe in something else.