

She is Cometh
by Abby Lee Hood

I see her and I know her
at once.
She has years and hair
and curves and commas in
her bank account. She has
things I will have but do
not currently possess.
She has flames and thighs
and lightning and wings.
She has power. Most
importantly, she has
patience and an
outstretched hand. I
swear to God I see her,
legs and locks and bare
feet on a throne of her
own making, forged of
sweat and dedication and
self-belief. Her palm is
soft but it is
open, offering a
hand up. A leg up. A word
of advice and
encouragement.
She offers love and
wisdom and asks nothing

of me but that I answer
the call. That I find
and secure and utilize the
building materials of the
throne on which she is
seated. I see her, and I
am in the throne room. My
hand pierces the veil of
time and I draw close,
hungry, blood in my nose
and dripping from teeth.
I see her, I worship her.
I am close to becoming
her, subsuming the mirage

and the myth until my
hips fill her ghostly
outline, and my eyes burn
like victory from her
sockets.

Abby Lee Hood is a Nashville-based journalist. She is currently diving into poetry and fiction to expand her horizons and lives with her hedgehog Noodle, and cat, Tom. She cares deeply about animal welfare, female empowerment and LGBTQ issues, being queer herself.



I am talking the children are watching
the bat fly around the ceiling they think
it's a bird I remember my lover wedged
between two trees trying to push himself up
in cowboy boots he tells me not to
help the children tell each other HIT IT HIT IT
HIT THE BIRD the bat flies faster in circles
away from its nest in the rafters placed
next to the ball the children kicked last week
the bat settles makes no sound the children
forget go back to the games he is quiet
at night our bodies touching I've grown
accustomed to our half-truths I love hymns
when his voice sings them the way his hips
move to rhythms the way he spends most
mornings whistling instead of talking I will not
let myself love him but I do love the kids
they tell me we will have a good day they won't
waste milk or water in their fruit or cornbread
saturating it like they did yesterday they never
want directions just space to make mistakes
to ruin what they think won't hurt them
to destroy I overhear one ask what to do
if the adult watching them drowns they are
told to call for help they forget their coats
when they go home it's hot then distracted
by the bat I forget my keys, too, my fears
why does it have to end sleep is a waste
of breath I close my lips to rest to watch
the hips the hymns the hums the time the ball
the bat drop from the wall wings open this time

Crystal Stone is the author of two collections of poetry, *Knock-Off Monarch* (Dawn Valley 2018) and *All the Places I Wish I Died* (CLASH 2021). Her poetry has previously appeared or is forthcoming in *The Threepenny Review*, *The Hopkins Review*, *Salamander*, *Poetry Daily*, *Writers Resist*, and many others. She is an MFA candidate at Iowa State University, formerly served as a poetry editor for *Flyway: Journal of Writing and Environment* and gave a TEDx talk entitled "The Transformative Power of Poetry" in April 2018. You can find her on Twitter @justlikeastone8, on Instagram @justlikeastonec, or at her website www.crystalstone.com.

Personal Statement
by Xenoria Lacy

Prompt: "We are aware that the world does not respond to mental illnesses as they do to physical illnesses. How has the lack of mental illness awareness in your family affected you and how did you form your aspirations while conflicting with your environment? Be honest and share your truth (Lacy 2018)."

I remember my feet dragging against the floor as I was being escorted by my mother and three detectives through the East Orange Police Department. My uncle, Phillip, had just been shot and killed. I was terrified to be surrounded by police. I wrapped my arms around the stuffed giraffe that I had dragged everywhere with me. It kept me comfort, it was the only thing that I knew would never leave me. The interrogation itself was ruthless. The police asked me if I had ever seen my uncle "sniff stuff" or if I had ever seen him have a gun. I was only five years old.

I know now that my uncle had fit the description of other black men wanted by police. My uncle Phillip was no killer, he was a law abiding citizen who really enjoyed cheesesteak sandwiches and WWE reruns. Most importantly he was human. I wish they had put more effort into finding his killer than finding him guilty of crimes he would never commit.

My innocence was gone from then on. However, school was always an escape. My uncle instilled a love of literacy onto me. He would show me how to do crossword puzzles and read *Green Eggs and Ham*. Reading allowed me to escape the harsh reality that I was facing early on and essentially opened up a new world to me. Once my senior year of high school began, I became passionate about pedagogy. From then on, I began to form my aspirations to teach children in inner-city schools and encourage them to be curious, open, and filled with grit. Just as my educators did for me. My teachers recognized my passion for writing early on and engraved in my head that my passions could take me far.

Even though I enjoyed school, to pretend that I was not struggling mentally was criminal. My family ignored the fact that I needed therapy for years. In fact, the situation feels like it was swept under the mat. It was not until I took action and spoke up about my struggles that I began therapy at the age of sixteen. For over ten years I was carrying loads of trauma on my shoulders. Unfortunately, my family does not see the importance in therapy, they believe in internalizing struggle and letting it continue to hinder them. I want to break these generational curses.

As I matured, I realized how much my uncle's story and my family's history formed my aspirations to change the negative connotation that surrounds treating mental health in the black community. I wanted to become who I needed when I was the five year old girl who clenched a stuffed animal in one hand and fear in the other.

Now I get a chance to further my passions into the world, while still learning about myself and unlearning some of the traits that I've inherited. My path to teaching is something that I could not foresee, because as a young girl I was encapsulated with fear. I was constantly told that I did not matter, by the law and by my family. Because of the constant ridicule, sometimes I am too hard on myself. I hold myself to high standards because subconsciously I believe that failure isn't an option. However in order to learn, I must make mistakes. My first mistake in adulthood was believing that it would only take four years to become an educator, but in reality it takes a lifetime. I'm in the process of learning about myself and life around me. I'm going to teach through my lenses and bring about change in the world one student at a time.

Xenoria Lacy is 18 years old and resides in New Jersey. They currently attend New Jersey City University and double major in English and Secondary Education with a concentration in African American Studies.



Poem With Depression
by Crystal Stone

He said eat a cat or breakfast
He said bigger beautiful same thing
He said how dare you love isn't a reason
He said you stay
He said drink my tears I don't have any
He said I did it for you your love is broken
He said here's some gas money
He said here's a fig your vagina is tight
He said flowers
He said don't let them drown
He said there's darkness inside you it isn't me
He said I'll pay you to quit
He said five dollars less you won't kill the bees
He said I have guns in the house don't snoop
He said you will remember me but how
He said it's my house you just have a key
He said you're the bed I'm in
He said I'm not angry anymore
He said I'm losing are you

He said less questions it's hard to talk
He said you're using me I don't know how
He said to live love is pain
He said the shower is dirty
He said it didn't used to be this way
He said I taped it up the roaches came out
He said I know you're tired let's recess
He said here's some aspirin
He said no no that's too much
He said come on here's a drawer climb in