

## P.S. While You Were Sleeping

I was a red bird in a play where I didn't know my lines. The director kept pushing me onto the stage where I'd flap-flap-flap my wings in an impromptu dance until the scene was over. **My house was slowly flooding with hot lava. Outside, I could see volcanos spouting and red rivers rushing across the land. I went down into the basement, which was knee-deep in magma, and thought, *We should have gotten a house on a hill.*** I was mauled horribly by wolves. As their teeth ripped my flesh, I thought, *Wow, that's not bad. Almost pleasant, actually. Tingly. What did I have to be afraid of?* I finally confronted her about being mean to me. "You used to be so nice," I said. "I don't understand what happened." I gave her a list of examples and she agreed—yes, it was true. She did like me, at first, but then she realized I wasn't very intelligent. I was searching for my friends after the apocalypse, brought on this time by angry dinosaurs. Inside an abandoned tunnel, I found a hot dog stand with a tall Plexiglass shield protecting the condiments. "Those dinos get hungry," the proprietor explained, "and you never know when they're going to strike." Standing on my tiptoes to reach the mustard, I thought, *These are just the sacrifices we're going to have to make now.* I was fumbling with my change at a donut shop counter, the line getting longer and longer behind me as I picked out a dime, a nickel, brushed the lint off a quarter I unearthed from my pocket. After a while, a frustrated customer yelled from the back of the line, "What is this, the '80s?!?" We had sex, and the next day he told me it meant nothing and would never happen again. When I got home, I parked and re-parked my car against the curb, unable to get the precise movements I wanted because of weak brakes. When I got out of the car, I watched a familiar white bird stand frozen in the street. **More scandalous scenes and I was biting her neck, digging my nails into her shoulder. "I'm not very cute right now," I said. "These pajamas aren't my most flattering outfit. I smell like laundry."** And she said, "I love your hair. It's so cute how it goes every which way." In the most posh R.V. in the world, we were traveling circus dumpster divers. Coca-Cola, donuts. I could transform into a giant and get us out of Albuquerque, but you were a cat,

scratching, saying, “No.” I was part of an elaborate vampire revivification that had me drinking gallons of blood. It was salty and warm and filled my belly until I thought I would puke. I drove over rough, desert terrain with an inflatable cactus that I had to keep filling and re-filling with air. I rescued mangled kittens from their evil captor who had cut and re-sewn their limbs in the wrong places. I discovered a mysterious underworld behind a Lazy Susan cupboard where I had to manually input a credit card number into the computer that would save us all. After the apocalypse, we were worker bees sorting through salvageable remains in some kind of compound in the desert. We decided to attempt an escape, and after much effort climbing the 50-foot tall, barbed-wire fence, the first one of us on the other side discovered that the gate had been open the entire time. It was the apocalypse—again—and we were gathered in an abandoned apartment eating candy with no plan. After inventorying our supplies, I came into the living room, where Jared was sitting next to a girl I’d never seen before. “Oh you don’t know so-and-so?” he said, “She does thus-and-such and knows what’s-his-name and she lives in a tree,” all while leaning toward her with that generic fascination of his, and I thought, *The world is ending and still all that asshole can think about is getting laid.* He showed me a secret sand dune that fell straight into the ocean, blue and coral and tropical. I misstepped and began to slide into the warm water, which was for some reason scary and to be avoided. I called his name, which seemed unusual and powerful—like we were not people who called each other’s names—and he pulled me out. Later, he had some new girlfriend who was clinging all over him, and we exchanged looks behind her back as though to say, “You and I will still be here long after she’s gone.” I wrote the truth on a piece of paper and taped it to your back. You wandered around not noticing it and I worried it was only a matter of time. I was a disappointment to people who had taken me in as family. I was teaching my brother how to fly off the shed roof which was slowly deflating underneath us while our father was getting high on crack. “Don’t ever try this when you’re awake,” I advised him, and held his hand while we jumped. Then, after I blew the candles out, everyone got up and left, all at once, like they’d been waiting for that moment for hours. I was at a high school football game in Everett with all of my homies from the late ’90s, all of us now grown-ass adults, smoking and kicking it in the bleachers like creepers, when an excited, whispering chatter broke out in

the audience at some news that had been shared. From the hubbub a person emerged, bright and awe-filled at my presence there, to congratulate me for winning a \$25,000 writing grant. To which I said: “Wait... what?” To which they said: “I read about it in the paper. Wow. Just wow.” And people in the audience were craning their necks to look at me and saying “There... Her... Yes, that’s the one... That’s what I heard...” and my homies, leaned back and sprawled like villains around me in the bleachers, nodded in approval of this development, saying things like “damn” and “no shit” and blowing smoke into our cold hometown air, and I was filled with glowing pride—not just for me, but for all of us, like we had all sprouted from the same root system, and any one of our triumphs belonged to the group: a motherfucking aspen forest, or more aptly a mushroom patch, and I just sat there, spine straight, leaves to the sun, and let my victory fall on us like rain.

Bucket Siler, originally from the Pacific Northwest, has been tethered to NM since 2006, where she writes, makes zines, and freelances to pay the rent. This is her first outside publication.