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Ro I have left you the cocoafluff and the Life Aquatic VHS (P.S. I met Bill Murray at LAX and he was not polite) and everything I won off of Bart in a poker game (two cans of yams and a UCLA hoodie) much love Emma

Robin Smith

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Ro I have left you the cocoafluff and the Life Aquatic VHS (P.S. I met Bill Murray at LAX and he was not polite) and everything I won off of Bart in a poker game (two cans of yams and a UCLA hoodie) much love Emma

Ro hadn't been seen by Emma for months. Their last written communications were a telegram sent from the Big Sur Campus post in January—

*Emma and Lake Monster Search Federation Committee. Rose Bowl Dressing Room A.*

*Love you. Caught two glimpses of Sassy. Best for Cocoafluff.*

—and a poem written in oak-gall ink, tucked in a Kelly-green envelope with a pressed violet.

#### Yellow Hearts

I make you cum rainbows  
& I fill my home  
with red balloons  
for you & we play video games  
beneath the blanket fort  
I made in the living room  
& you put my name in yellow hearts  
even though I held you carefully my  
summer peach & I ate you  
alive with every love poem I wrote.  
You couldn't love me the way  
I needed you to, yellow hearts  
yellow hearts when I left.

Reader, imagine your heart, every aorta, every flaw, what makes it warm besides blood. Imagine the way it would look in your lover's palm. Would they cradle it, carefully? Does your heart have to beg you to be kind to her?

As head of the board for the secret society, the Lake Monster Search Federation Committee, Emma knew that a triple-reason trip was in order. The first was to find the Cocoafluff, a small aquatic lake monster that lived exclusively beneath waterfalls. Its resemblance was half cat, half fish. It could be easily transported in the breathable, bubble backpacks that hikers liked to transport their cats in. The second part of the trip would be an unofficial rescue mission. Ro hated the idea of being “rescued,” but it had been over three months since she had been sighted by a tourist or a Boy Scout group. So, it was decided by the federation of Lake Monster searchers to put a lookout for her. The third reason for the trip was that it was, in effect, a breakup mission. Emma and Ro had been alone with one another for decades, but their competing careers and schedules were tearing them apart. It was one thing when their missions coincided—looking for trolls, or lake monsters, or yeti. But now, as the demand for a professional Sasquatch hunter or a lake monster searcher diminished in a collapsing economy, there was less demand to work together.

Emma wasn't looking forward to this mission, despite the enticing lure of the Cocoafluff. She loved Ro. She remembered when Ro descended on their first search party in a neon-pink hot air balloon. She was wearing yellow rain boots covered in white stars. She was listening to Rainbow Kitten Surprise; she had a stack of Wes Anderson video tapes and a bag of Cheetos which she graciously offered to Emma. Ro was a wonder. The love letters and telegrams and secret messages sent in lemon ink and oak gall drove Emma further over the edge. Ro had a way with words, but also a way of not using the right words when she needed to. Maybe that's why she liked to spend so much time with the redwoods and the lure of Sassy—formally known as Bigfoot—who occasionally would take the common form of a lynx or the Bushman in San Francisco.

But Emma had other reasons to end her engagement with Ro. It wasn't just her need for solitude or constant adventure, or for her eclectic taste in art and poetry. It was the fact that Ro hadn't written Emma a love poem in over a year. It was as if her passion faded into the sea as quickly as it manifested.

The search for the Cocoafluff and Ro began on a Tuesday evening with a dusty rose submarine and Bart, a friendly harbor master in Lake Tahoe. The harbor master guarded expensive lake yachts owned by Tahoe's elite. He also ran security for a prominent casino on the north shore. Bart was 78 years old and was a founding member of the Lake Monster Search Federation. He had introduced his two granddaughters to the baby lake monsters indigenous to Tahoe: the Silky and the Maritas, both tiny water

scorpions that lived on the bottom of the lake. The Lake Monster Search Federation was kept secret, if only because Bart wanted something to bond with his grandchildren over. Fishing was a boring sport. Seeking secret monsters at the bottom of a lake that had yet been fully explored due to its depth and mystery was a better bonding activity. He had grown close to Emma and Ro as they advanced in the Federation's ranks. When they were together, it was as if an aquatic femme fatale of fireflies had lit up the bottom of Lake Tahoe. They were crazy mad about one another. The men would stand speechless in speakeasies and stare at them enviously, as they swayed like seahorses together. They were love embodied. So, Bart was more than happy to charter Emma in the sub towards the underwater caverns where Ro was last spotted. He felt as if he was helping her reunite with a lost love. That kind of love is needed in the world. That pulpy monster that feeds on the heart, such a necessary evil, Bart thought.

Emma and Bart spent two days in the sub. They drank wheat beer and whiskey, plotted courses around some of the more remote trails in Tahoe, mapped the likely islands and caves where Ro might be lurking. Sassy normally was seen in the coastal towns of the PCH, gorging on second-hand trash and tourist brochures, glamping tent tassels and such, but the rumor was that Sassy had adjourned to Tahoe for a quick gambling-and-cocktail run. Ro would more than likely be there.

Bart lit the main cabin with an antique lantern and two rose candles. Emma looked beautiful in the light, with her soft apple-green hair, and velvet purple lips. Her hands trembled as she leafed through the logs of the last noted sightings of both her paramour and Sassy. Bart knew then that something was wrong. He decided not to push it. Only to speculate on that lake monster of the heart.

Reader, oh reader, I am going to take you from this narrative for just a moment. Into a dark and quiet room, where two cats are purring, and music is playing. I want you to place your hand above your heart, what music can you make of it? If you had to describe the importance of your own heart to your body, of your own heart to your soul? What music would you make of it? What would we do if our own hearts reject us in the dark? What else would we do with a heart so feral and mean, but to rip it away?

On the second day of their expedition, they found a Cocoafluff hidden beneath Horsetail Falls. It had a diamond tail. Its fur was water repellent like an otter's, but thick and warm. It had the attitude of a house cat begging for canned tuna, and it bit when petted on the belly. Perhaps it was cared for by

hikers? Bart grumbled. Emma slept with the Cocoafluff, fed it Captain Crunch and strawberries, and gave it a bowtie. The legends swerve true: it took quite quickly to the wild strawberries and to Emma.

It was on the third day that Bart left Emma at the bottom of a secret cavern on the south end of Tahoe. (Due to poor funding by the U.S. government, the cavern was not properly graphed.) She carried the Cocoafluff and a few oxygen tanks in her arms. She also took snacks in her red pack.

Bart smiled. He could sense Ro was close. Hopefully, the two could work it out. But he could also tell by Emma's growing sadness this might not be the case.

Emma took two minutes in the underwater cavern, before she found a tunnel that led up to some natural light. She emerged into a grotto of spruce and aspens. The night sky was brilliant. A yellow tent stood on the lake shore, a small fire next to it. Tied between two trees, a clothesline held a pair of bright red wool socks, a yellow raincoat, a pink dress, and a white beanie. Emma immediately knew these were Ro's because of the careful monographs stitched into the socks. She slid her Cocoafluff into her bubble backpack, then placed her oxygen tanks on the ground. The yellow tent burned like its own wildfire on the beach. She made her way to it, nervous and shaking. It was as if glitter was coursing through her blood—no, fireworks, or duck feathers, or some useless metaphor. She checked on Cocoafluff. (This is not a Harry Potter fan-fiction: the wild animals here are still very wild.) Her Cocoafluff was purring contentedly, however, pawing at a dangling mousefish stuffed with catnip, which hung from the backpack.

The purring should have calmed her, or the water rushing to the shore. But no one is really prepared to confront a soon-to-be ex. She reached into the pocket of her olive-green trench coat for the box that held the rose quartz ring. She was originally planning to propose to Ro with it. But it would only take a minute to deliver the bad news, Emma thought, just a minute. It would be over. Ro might not even care. It will all be ok, eventually, Emma thought. And then there Ro was, out of the winter melt, her red hair streaming over shoulders, her neon yellow bathing suit daring the moon to hide herself. Her beauty, daring the mountains to take notes on humility. Ro's outward beauty knew nothing of humility. Emma knew as Ro knocked the water out of her ears that it was over. This was it. Nothing had changed. But then another figure appeared. Another woman, who if possible outshone Ro. She was wearing gold, so much of it, no—it was her smile, red and subtle.

Emma stopped. Emma felt the weight of the lachrymose monster eating her alive in small, perfectly controlled bites. She dropped her red pack filled with Cheetos and cherries. She knew if she could back away from Ro and find the cavern and the pink submarine, then this feeling of disappointment would have to ease. At the very least it would save her the embarrassment. But lupine, Ro had already caught her eyes. They flashed all rainbow in the moonlight. The fae next to her turned around and dove beneath the water.

Oh reader, have you ever felt your heart break in this way?

There is a choice. Sometimes it has nothing to do with finding the monster that eats us alive. It has everything to do with keeping it. Wild and thrashing, in our palms, in our very skin, inside the way, that Ro and Emma kept each other until the primal dawn of morning. Reader, I dare you to conjure someone more flawed, more crystalline. And when Emma woke with fluffy clouds and sunlight hovering in the tent, with Ro's red hair streaming down her back, she tasted the word wonder over and over in her left cheek. Wonder, and beauty, and heartbreak, and rose quartz.

And where do we go from here? Reader, if I told you Emma was a metaphor for the heart, what would you make of this? Where do we go from here, reader? Where do we go from here?

## About Robin Smith

Robin Smith is a femme, queer, writer & scholar originally from Northern California. Robin is the author of the chapbook "Confessions of a Love Addict" (Dancing Girl Press, 2020) and *Love Glut*, winner of the Rebel Satori Press first book prize (forthcoming in 2021). She is also winner of the Academy of American Poets Prize, Thomas McGrath Award for poetry, the Katherine B. Tiffany Award, among others. Her work has appeared in *By & By* poetry review, *Aji Literary Magazine*, *Visual Artists Collective*, *Westwind*, *Legendary Review*, and *PACIFICReview*, among many others. Her work has also been featured in anthologies such as *Bliss* and *Drawn to Comics*. She was the lead poetry editor for the *Northridge Review*, and the founder and chief editor for *Glut Poetry Review*. Robin Smith was the judge of the 2019 Rachel Sherman award for up and coming poets. She received her B.A and M.A in Creative Writing (poetry) from California State Northridge and is currently attending the University of North Dakota where she is pursuing her Doctorate in Creative Writing. Her major fields include Post-1945 American literature (fiction with an emphasis on identity) and Contemporary Lyric Poetry. Robin

currently teaches Writing Composition for the Launch program at Lake Region State College in Grand Forks, North Dakota. She also teaches kindergarten at Grand Forks Montessori Academy.