

DICH__O T__OMY and Hallucinations

By Ember Carroll

WHY I LIKE IT: *Poetry Editor HEZEKIAH writes... Carroll offers us a one-trick poem. I just love it when someone showcases their work rather than sends a survey of this-and-that, expeditiously fishing in a taster's-choice-test derby. The rest of the editors don't get anthologies of short stories or screenplays with half-a-dozen sequels...it's left to the one with the least appreciations and most ancient credentials. Ember is white-hot, liquid-light (Note the punning and well-worn phrasing?). Okay, go! "She was sitting. A hard, reupholstered satin-covered chair. / She was riding. Dragon scales scraped against her thighs. / The chair groaned, or was it a roar?" ...Don't you just love the longma dogma already? Men-loving-women-loving-horses—never venture behind either of them...(or at least stay out of cow-kicking range). "...Your nightmares have bled into the daytime.""* Carroll[s] enjoys 'tabletop roleplaying games' and asked for 'feedback.' Well, this is the first poem that I have read in my tenure here that has ever made me cry. Not because it was so sad, but because it was so moving...in a longing for universal communing. No sense reading any more of me—where is the incentive in highlighting something that's flawless. Ember and Carroll can write in anytime. And I genuinely, most sincerely, (secretly) hope they do... "The world is a mirror. / I'm trapped in the glass."

Dichotomy and Hallucinations

She was sitting. A hard, reupholstered satin-covered chair.
She was riding. Dragon scales scraped against her thighs.

The chair groaned, or was it a roar?
She could feel the heat now.
Surely, it was a dragon.

"You're hallucinating. Your nightmares have bled into the daytime."

I can't be.
Can't you feel the wind?
I'm flying.
I must be.

I have to be.

“If you take these pills, it will stop.”

Take the blue pill.

Take the red pill.

They all leave poison on the tongue.

He lied.

He said it would stop.

The world ripples.

The world is a mirror.

I've lived in the world of glass for eighteen months.

I've seen selkies, nymphs, sirens, dragons.

Things I've always known to never be...real.

I've seen the world bend and sway.

I've seen

words

drop

off

pages

like water dripping off leaves

and I've been trying to tell someone what I see.

No one listens.

No one comprehends.

I'm alone.

People touch me and my skin falls off.

My wife stares in horror.

I don't know how to tell her that if someone touches me, I will break.

I don't know how to describe the pain of being completely alone in a world of glass.

Reflections trick me constantly.

I can't figure out who keeps standing in my mirror.

That's not old me.

It's not new me.

I grasp and pull at the face in the mirror.

My face hurts.

That's not my face.

The world is upside down.

Take the red pill.

The world is sideways.
Take the blue pill.

The world is askew.
I didn't take my pill.

The world is right side up.

"Such a blessing."
Why?
Because the world looks right?
Because the world doesn't bend, flow, ebb?
The world was the moon, a mirror.

The world is right now.
I am not.

The face in the mirror frowns back at me.
I keep trying to grab their hand.
I keep trying to tell them

"it'll be okay."

I don't know how to talk to someone in a mirror.
I don't know how to touch flesh, all I touch is cold glass.

My brain says that's me.
People say that's me.

That can't be me.

I'm a walk-in appointment at Super Clips.
I ask for the one man to cut my hair,
to the stares of old women.
to the frowns or disappointed looks of the women stylists.
I get a faux-hawk.
I dye my hair green.

I try to find the person in the mirror again.

My hair matches theirs.
My nose matches theirs.
My glasses match theirs.

I touch part of my reflection.

I step out of the mirror the first time that day.

I'm back inside.
I wonder when it will be safe to come out.

I want to come out.

The world is a mirror,
and nothing looks right.
Nothing has looked right for a long time.

The world is glass.
It ripples around me,
enveloping.

“I have to grieve who you were.”

“That’s not your name.”

“What’s your birth name?”

“What’s your legal name?”

“You have to use your birth sex for medical reasons.”

“Ma’am?”

“Miss?”

I want to rip apart everyone’s throats,
so they can’t say the name of the child who

screamed
cried
begged
pleaded

when everyone did what they wanted to her.

when everyone used her and broke her.

when she was used as a sex toy.

when all she wanted was a mother or a sister or any woman to love her.

My name is Ember.

“I won’t remember that.”

“That’s a weird name.”

“What’s your birth name?”

“I won’t call you that.”

I’m nonbinary.

“You’re confused.”

“Why does everyone have to be a special snowflake these days?”

"Can't you just be a woman?"

"You were born a woman."

"No, you're a woman."

I'm genderfluid.

"What the hell's that?"

"You're a freak."

"See? Told you, you're a woman."

"You can't be anything any given day."

"You're just a tomboy."

"You just like wearing men's clothes."

The world is a mirror.

I'm trapped in the glass.

THE POET SPEAKS... *I have always drawn inspiration from personal experience, muddled with my educational experiences (college, high school, etc.) and my love of the world around me. I have always been told I am too much, too dramatic, too bold, too loud. I'm a queer, leftist, GNC person and I live in the Bible Belt. Writing lets me express my true inner self, it is the only way to be authentic due to where I live. I have been influenced by confessional poets, most notably Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton.*

Dichotomy and Hallucinations was inspired by my experience during the pandemic. I was a victim of medical malpractice, and have been living the last eighteen months dealing with constant panic attacks, hallucinations, dissociation, memory issues, sickness, and gender dysphoria. I was finally able to get some of the health issues resolved and after "seeing the light" of reality, I was inspired to write this piece.

AUTHOR BIO: "Ember Carroll is a reference librarian and technical writer. They are also a published poet in two literary journals, Peaches Lit Mag and The Voices Project. In addition to pursuing their education, they also enjoy tabletop role-playing games, board games, creative writing, and making art. They currently live in Missouri with their wife and two guinea pigs. They believe that the key to healing from trauma is to tell the truth, and to never silence themselves or others."

