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California

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Social custom likewise dictates that you absolutely refuse to shut the hell up about it.

You'd initially planned to adhere to custom, to board a plane and turn thirty years old in a mist of strangers and peculiar smells.

Instead, you think of it months later while reading a book of Anne Sexton's poetry in the midst of a Texas blizzard. You wear a fur coat inside to stave off the unexpected bounty of frozen water. Only a few miles away, people burn down their houses to keep warm.

Perhaps it is her proximity to catastrophe, her effortless confessions that punch you in the gut with their predetermined tragedy that make you wish you were somewhere else.

Even in your own indulgence, your daydream escape to the streets of the Franciscan Oz, she follows without speaking.

Her ghost follows you through the streets you build with the cobblestones of your own lonely madness like a stranger who inevitably shops for groceries at the same corner store as you.

Instead, she weathers the storm with you, this monster-woman who claims her seat of honor in the pantheon of American geniuses.

She sits beside you on the beaches of northern California, where you seek reprieve from the world growing cold outside your window...

..letting out her maxims like a sea lion cowing her deathsong beneath a fisherman's warf:

terrible, untidy, and persistent...

..but not without some

Coyote Shook is a cartoonist and Ph.D. student. They are currently working on a graphic novel dissertation on an environmental history of the Everglades with the department of American Studies at the University of Texas, Austin. Their work has appeared in The Puritan, The Ransom Center Magazine, The Florida Review, the Society of Historians for the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, the National Humanities Center, and The Wisconsin Review and is currently in publication with North Dakota Quarterly and Honey Literary Magazine. Their debut graphic novel, Coyote the Beautiful, was the winner of the 2020 Leiby Chapbook Award with The Florida Review.