

## **Grendel's Mother Considers Therapy**

*Nadia Arioli*

but not as an alternative to revenge. More of a *yes and*, like you see in improv troupes, but this is no laughing matter. She gets jittery at the thought of it, like someone who's had too much espresso, including the bathroom aspect of that. Grendel's mother considers therapy. Her insurance will pay for it, it would seem. Or part of it, or sometimes there's a co-pay and sometimes there isn't. Grendel's mother isn't too sure. She's been distracted of late, which is something therapy could probably help her with. Grendel's mother seeks validation, which, wow, embarrassing, but she wants permission to own her grief. Permission—what a laugh. Grendel's mother doesn't knock.

Grendel's mother considers the logistics, the travel time. She doesn't have pockets to put the insurance card and paper cheque and so forth in. She doesn't drive a car and can't seem to make heads or tails of the bus schedule. Also, she's a monster. She can hardly amble down Main Street without catching a scream or two. And most of the time finding a therapist is a whole thing and involves making phone calls and even—god forbid!—leaving a voicemail. Why do they make it so complicated? Grendel's mother rages. Therapy is for people who in a state such that they cannot do complex tasks so why not make it as complicated as possible? Why the hell not? The barriers are bigger than walls. And Grendel's mother remembers all the complex things she used to do—chewing bones into paste and baby-birding it into Grendel's maw. Building camouflage for the front of her cave when he was born out of twigs and leaves held together with mud and intention. Timing the raids just right until Grendel got the hang of it until he didn't.

Grendel's mother imagines making a day of it, going to therapy. It's only in the next town, but errands have a way of taking over the whole day even if it's really just an hour or two. Maybe she could stop and get coffee

on the way or stop at the picnic tables on the way back for lunch or even just a smoke. Therapy makes one want cigarettes, even if you've quit, so much breathing in yourself, your scent, your mistakes, that it feels good to breath in something else, anything else, even poison, even cancer, that isn't just your own bullshit.

Grendel's mother imagines in the past she went to therapy, right after Grendel was born, say, that's when she did it. She went, drove herself because she had a car in those days. The therapist's office is nice but bland. There's a certain decorating style to therapist's offices, isn't there? It's trying very hard to not be any one thing. Her and her therapist have a good rapport. She tells her therapist of her intense need to be desired but not desired, to be touched but not touched, and how the hormones are making her a monster. She wails, clutching tissues in her right claw, she doesn't even know who she is anymore, between the feedings and the wiping and the late nights, who is she anymore. Her body is pudgy around the middle, and no one wants to see her in a swimsuit anymore, not that they really did in the first place. And who the fuck, who the fuck does she think she is seeking validation through men, the men, the men, always the men with them looking at her before they saw prey, saw threat, saw target.

Grendel's mother considers leaving an audience for grief and decides she hates the thought. Grief is valid, she thinks, unknown grief is valid. Leave no witnesses. Leave no one to hear wails. You don't need a confessor to absolve you, you don't need a stranger scribbling in a notebook. You don't need a written record shoved and forgotten in a drawer. You were born alone. You don't remember it, but you are sure. Your mother whelped you out, wet ball of fur, helpless and disgusting. For a time, you weren't alone, second self, guiding star. Then you were alone again, and it was worse, somehow. No matter. No matter the gaps in your teeth. No matter that your cries are different—hollow like caves, hollow like empty nests, hollow like bullets. You just need your claws. You can write the whole thing in red.

**Nadia Arioli** is the editor in chief of *Thimble Literary Magazine*. A three-time nominee for Best of the Net, Arioli's poetry can be found in *Cider Press Review*, *Rust + Moth*, *McNeese Review*, and elsewhere. Essays have been nominated for Best of the Net and the Pushcart and can be found in *Hunger Mountain*, *Heavy Feather Review* and elsewhere. Artwork has appeared in *Permafrost*, *Kissing Dynamite*, and *Poetry Northwest*. Arioli's latest collections are with *Dancing Girl* and *Kelsay Books*.