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Five Dreams, Tehkummah, Ontario, to Haysi, Virginia

Erin Wilson

E: *How has this happened, that I should be dreaming of being you, with your tongue?*

C: *How you ever think hit was you dreamed yourself?*

i.

My first night in Appalachia, seamlessly I awaken into my dream. My hands are hers. Our legs are ours. I speak. I am Charlotte.

C: *Hit not right! They take bar breastses.*

C: *I telled them thar Rock-weiler come on my property 'n I will SHOOT hit!*

C: *Ohhh! Look at hit (the gnat, the sun, the grandchild, the plum tree)! Clapping, It done had bay-bee~zzz!*

C: *This plant bure, this land, chil'uns, hits my body...*



ii.

My second night, I dream I am me. Although I'm silent, I know if I did speak, my tongue would again be full of Appalachian colour.

I unfold a batch of papers I've brought with me. These are diagrams of someone doing recuperative exercises, *bridge*, *spinal roll*, *crab*. There's even an image of an adult crawling. I must learn how to be in this new body. My physiotherapist has written across the images, "**Pain does not equal damage!**"

Charlotte watches me unfold, then refold the papers. Her eyes are all over me in the way a scholar might study a text or a haiku poet might study a white chrysanthemum. She opens the Andrew Wyeth book I gave her for Christmas that she keeps near the glass jar of flossy milkweed pods she likes to study in light. She flips through the book until she finds *Christina's World*. Then she looks at me and speaks.

C: *Honey, Hit won't serve nobody to keep no pride.*

She crawls out of her own crumpled body, into the image of Christina, and claws her way up the side of the mountain, pulling the not-quite-dead-weight of her legs behind her, until I can't see her anymore. I can only make out the grasses slightly swaying. From this distance it sounds like they are saying, *this, this, this...*

iii.

Not E exactly, but from E: *If you want to learn the truth, dream more absurd.*

My third night, I dream a great sycamore, spectral and spotted, comes to me. (What is the division between maculate and immaculate, I wonder.) Silently, the sycamore undoes every button on what I'm wearing, then silently undoes every button on what it's wearing. We stand and stare into one another until we are nearly erased. The more we are erased, the truer we are. The tears that steadily fall from our eyes do not mean that we are sad, nor do the tears mean that we are *not* sad. There are simply tears.

When I am naked, I look down to see a thorn protrudes from my side. When the sycamore is naked, I see a thorn protrudes from its side. Our tears cause the tender red skin around our thorns to shine and appear blistered.

E (breathlessly, while staring into the sycamore): Are you *miraculous*?

S (murmuring, while staring into Erin): Are *you* miraculous?

Charlotte, a bird now, flies overhead. Lowly, she coos, *Thar will always be sacrifices, chil'uns.*



iv.

The fourth night, I sleep in a dated, no-frills motel, in Indiana. I am headed north, back home. It takes a long time to get to sleep because my old life is pouring back over me like icy water. When I finally close my eyes, I see Charlotte just like she was when I was in Virginia. She lets go of the garden fence for a moment and steadies herself. Then, not knowing how this will go, carefully lowers herself on joints and muscles that barely work anymore. Down on all fours, she separates the garden's decay from the otherwise hidden fresh green growth.

She tests me.

C: *What's this, honey?*

E: *Oregano, peppermint, wild garlic, onion...*

C: *I'm so proud a-you!*



In the earth, behind the cinder block shed she built by herself, are perfectly round, palm-sized holes.

C: 'N what made them holes thar, you think?

For the rest of the night, while I linger on borrowed pillows, her gnarled but able hands strike quick as snakes, grabbing one copperhead after another. She squeezes them with all her strength, forcing their mouths open. All along their gums and fangs, she rubs poison.

C: You won't git me! Take this, she rubs. You'ns just take thisss...



v.

E: *Are these dreams about the body or dreams about language?*

The fifth night, I am home again. All night long, I keep crossing and recrossing the U.S./Canada border. In my absence, all the trees that I had known before have grown shorter. The treeline, an oily black-green rag of cursive, is so distant it's hard to read. I open my mouth to ear-popping aphasia. Dead dogs spill out silently to paint the night.



Biography

Erin Wilson is from an island community of a couple hundred people. Her poems have appeared in *The Fiddlehead*, *Arc Poetry Magazine*, *Prairie Fire*, *TNQ*, *EVENT Magazine*, *Freefall*, *TAR*, *Dalhousie Review*, *Queen's Quarterly*, *The Ex-Puritan*, *Nashwaak Review*, *Vallum*, and elsewhere internationally. She has won a Pushcart and a Silver Medal with the National Magazine Awards in Canada. Her work appears in *Best Canadian Poetry 2026*. She lives in a small town on Robinson-Huron Treaty Territory, in Northern Ontario, Canada, the traditional lands of the Anishinaabe. She is most at home amongst trees. She refuses to carry a cell phone.