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## THE GOD OF INSPIRATION AND HIS MAGICAL MEDE

*Laura op de Beke – Creative Writing Group Clio*

It's Wednesday, almost midnight and this essay is not going to write itself, but it's one of those days on which everything you write is going to be shit anyway, so I'm thinking *why bother?* My fingers rest on the keyboard, thoughts go wandering. I'm in the university library and it's getting dark outside. Winter has difficulty letting go, still clutching at the water's edge with freezing fingers. The sky is dark, the water still darker. A wild wind terrorises the treetops in the square, a gale that has sent all people to seek shelter.

Then something moves behind a bookcase. I lean back in my chair and roll it half a meter backwards so I can see the culprit: a tall, bearded man, staring intently at a collection of shelves (Scandinavian Literature). Slightly self-conscious I swivel back to my desk, where my laptop hums disapprovingly. After a deep sigh and a glance at the time I decide it's getting far too late for me to produce anything comprehensible. I start packing.

"Are you going to give up that easily?" He has not moved, is not even looking at me. "It's not going to be any good if it comes too easy. Everything valuable comes at a cost". I look at him and wonder if maybe he's some kind of counsellor, or a librarian but he has that look that says 'wizard' and also maybe 'slightly mad' with his keen, shifty blue-eyes. "Knowledge requires sacrifice". His deep, scratchy voice unnerves me. "I'm sorry, are you a librarian? Is it closing time? Because I was already leaving". He shakes his head and wanders a little closer while suddenly the tubular lighting starts flickering innocently. I can see the gleaming whiteness of his eyes, one of which is different from the other, though I can't tell in what way. He looks right through me and whispers: "What are you working at? It's not coming along is it?" I shake my head and show him the cover of my paperback –Faustus– by Christopher Marlowe. He responds with an affirmative nod of the head. "A classic, I love stories about a good sacrifice. Have you tried coffee?" At the look of my bewildered face he continues, "For inspiration I mean. Coffee always works wonders for me. At least when I brew it."

The way he says it 'brewed', strikes me as something out of this time. Suddenly I wonder how old he is and what he's doing in the library this late, looking so forlorn. "That's alright, maybe I'll get some from the machine downstairs." I say, gathering my stuff. "I'll walk you" he answers and true enough, we share an awkward silence all the way down to the cafeteria. He beats me to the coffee dispenser and hits a button I *know* shouldn't be there. It's large and gold, and it adorns what looks to me like a runic inscription. He catches my look of awe and winks while the machine prepares the drink and the air is filled with the odour of a rich, sweet-smelling substance. When it's done he hands me the cup. Perhaps it's the light, but his eyes seem golden.

"It's not really coffee is it?" I ask. He grins. "It's better." I don't know what to say, I feel enthralled. Suddenly something hits the windows. The noise is like a gunshot and startles me. I see a flash of feathers, the flapping of wings. A crow perhaps. "I have to go, they're getting restless. You're welcome by the way for that costly cup of genius in your hand. Don't forget about it. You may be called upon to return the favour." And then he leaves and I feel strangely reverent.

Carefully I take a sip. The liquid runs down my throat, into the pit of my empty stomach, but it goes beyond that: all the way into the tips of my fingers, which suddenly ache for the keys of my laptop. Whole sentences start to form in my mind; I know how to finish the essay. It feels so obvious. All this time I've been waiting for the click. It's heart-rendering. Knowledge is empathy, understanding. Poor Faustus. Poor thing.

## OPHELIA

*Minke Jonk*

It's not fair that you should leave me  
 Because your hand, I held in mine  
 It's not fair that you just left me  
 True minds are meant to be in line

Married without objections  
 At least, that's what my father said  
 Before he died and left my mother's bed  
 To be given to another

That is why I'm drowning  
 And still floating around  
 There is no sense in leaving  
 I'm waiting to be found

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## WHEN DEATH SHAKES

*Liselore Goossens*

There's no going back now. You've made your decisions and played your cards, and now you have to follow up on what you started. Ride out what you set in motion. You were dealt cards and you dealt with them. You did as you pleased and pleased as you lived. You made your choice and set out the route and as planned, you ended up here. Do you have doubts? Maybe, but none big enough. Regrets? Fears? Nothing is strong enough to hold you back anymore.

So you soar.

A punch in the face. And then another in your gut. One moment you're standing up straight, strong – scared perhaps, but determined. The next your world is pulled from under your feet, beaten down, scattered and shattered. The next you're bending over clutching your sides, tumbling, fragmented, shaken. 'She's not going to make it.' There is detachment in the voice, it's just another routine, but not for you. You've stood by her side through it all. You faced it together and you were going to come out of it together. You were so certain.

You aren't certain of anything anymore.

*It is possible to die.* You read the words and it shifts something. They're only five simple words, four of them monosyllabic but you read them and something in your brain snaps. It is possible: it could happen any moment. You could die at any given moment, any given place, any given way. It wouldn't take much more than a heart failure – a speeding car – a knife to your veins. The end of your life could be in anyone's hands: God's, a stranger's, your own. You have never fully realized just how fragile living really is until you read those words, and it rattles you. You have never been so aware of the options, the possibilities.

You have never been more determined to *live*.

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## CREATIVE WRITING DIY

*Tip-top tips and tricks for do-it-yourself creative writing*

- **If you want to write, write.** Planning your story is a good idea, but don't let this process take forever. There is nothing more detrimental to motivation than a blank page. So just get started. Pour yourself a glass of wine and stay in for the evening. Also, disconnect your internet, however scary that might feel. Facebook is every writer's mortal enemy.
- **Do not endlessly mull over every line.** Just write, get into it and then leave it to 'cool off' for a day or two, then start editing and embellishing. Only very rarely does your first draft contain sentences of pure genius. Genius is the result of hard work and a lot of patience. The Flemish author Tom Lanoye once said "A writer's greatest asset is a big ass to sit on comfortably while (s)he's rewriting".
- **Print your text,** grab a pen and start correcting as if you were a teacher, or the world's most-difficult-to-please reader. A story always looks different on paper. It will help you spot errors that you missed on screen.
- It is a generally accepted truth that when you write you are supposed to write for the dumbest readers imaginable – however, most of the time this presumption just leads to an excess of detail. You should **have faith in your readers**. A text can be implicit and mysterious without being difficult to read; as long as you do give the reader something to hold on to in regard to setting and character.
- **Be hard on yourself.** You should be your own toughest critic.
- **Practice makes perfect.**
- When writing you should take care that **every sentence you write is relevant**. Don't just write anything in order to fill the screen. Detail is fine, but keep it limited and to the point. If it's not important that your character is wearing a blue shirt, don't mention it. If it is, by all means, do.
- Lastly, **look for role-models**. Once you've found that writer that you adore, and whose style you believe to be the most beautiful and most appealing, don't be afraid to set it as an example for your own writing. It helps to know what people look for in a novel.

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## CAMALUS: A STORY

By Jordi van de Weerd

*Camalus the dodo, King of Caelia, is ordered to explore an newly discovered island. He is trying to find the Halcyon, a mysterious animal that might help him across the ocean and onto the island. He asks Lughus, the parrot librarian, for his help.*

### The Halcyon

“Bring me all the texts on ancient myths,” ordered Lughus. Lelantos, who had been calmly dusting the tops of the cupboards, was startled by his master's sudden entrance. His master had always been a bit peculiar, but something seemed to have invigorated him.

“What happened master?” Lelantos asked.

“We have no time!” squawked Lughus. While being used to his master's strange habits, Lelantos could tell now was the time to do as he was told.

“What myths are we looking for master?” asked Lelantos. Even though he knew this was not a good time to ask, he dreaded the task of sorting the library's contents, something his master took great pleasure in. Lelantos was good with books, less so with others. He had always wanted to work in the library, to preserve and understand the history of Caelia, but after a few months in the library he was not so sure. Lughus was a brilliant master, but very unskilled at teaching. Not trusting Lelantos with anything, he would usually be given a menial task, such as dusting the books and cupboards. Not that Lelantos didn't appreciate the time spent alone.

“We're looking for an ancient species,” answered Lughus suddenly. Lelantos knew that tone of voice, this was all the information he was going to get. He walked to the back room and retrieved the texts dealing with ancient species and myths. He barely managed to find them all before Lughus grabbed them from his claws and sat down at his desk. Lelantos knew what this meant, he would be here all night helping his master find that which he could not speak of. He resigned himself into a chair opposite Lughus and started reading the texts.

“Look for any reference to an ancient species connected to the sea,” Lughus suddenly whispered. Lelantos was taken aback, his master didn't usually share his thoughts or research with him. Excitement filled Lelantos, and he started scanning the texts for anything related to birds and water.

“I would not ask you for help if I could avoid it, so would you focus?” squawked Lughus angrily. Realising he had a look of awe on his face, Lelantos quickly composed himself and returned to the texts. Sighing to himself, Lughus thought about how he was as an apprentice, and how he had been striving to please his master. *Perhaps I have given him too little credit, he has been invaluable to my research.*

“We are looking for the Halcyon,” Lughus suddenly said. His apprentice stared at him blankly.

“But master, I thought the Halcyon were a mere tale?” Lelantos was puzzled by his master's sudden comment. It was very unlike him to confide in his apprentice.

“I see you are puzzled, but understand that this is of the utmost importance,” said Lughus. Clearly, Lughus wanted to speak more but could not, Lelantos thought. Although he spent most of his time in the library, Lelantos knew much and suspected a great deal more. News travels fast, especially where their leader is concerned.

“Is this why you had to see Camalus, master?” asked Lelantos.

Taken aback by the brashness of his apprentice, Lughus looked up and squinted through his monocle.

“I should have known there would be talk on the streets. I had hoped to keep it a secret for longer,” sighed Lughus.

“I did not wish to cause you inconvenience, master,” Lelantos replied.

“You have not, and if you are to be of any real use I might as well tell you what has happened,” said Lughus.

As Lughus finished speaking, Lelantos eyes and mouth were wide open.

"I have not treated you so unfairly that my offer would warrant such a response, have I?" asked Lughus. Lelantos seemed to be daydreaming, for it took him a while to respond.

"Master, I think we may have found it," was all he could say.

### A Fearful King

"How goes the preparation in Caelia?" asked Muscio. A trembling badger stood before him, terrified of his king's response to the news. Their king had always been cruel, and made no attempt to hide it. He had come to power through manipulation, torture, and execution, and saw these as useful tools in maintaining the throne. Including murdering anyone who bore dire news.

"Our scouts overheard a meeting in the palace of Caelia. Their librarian seems to have found the location of a species that will help them reach the island."

Hearing this news, Muscio stood up from his golden throne and walked over to the messenger. His black and white fur rising, claws extended, fuming with rage. The messenger had mere seconds to let out a terrifying cry before Muscio's claws were on his throat, snapping his neck instantly.

"Bring me Tharandar!" screamed Muscio. His guards had seen this happen many times before, and without a word left the throne room.

"I should have known Camalus would prove to be a problem. If he truly finds these Halcyon my plan will be ruined," Muscio muttered to himself. Waiting for Tharandar to enter, he impatiently paced the room.

"My lord, you have summoned me?" asked Tharandar.

"How is it that Camalus has found a way to reach the island?" screamed Muscio in his usual high-pitched voice.

"The chief librarian seems to have located references to the Halcyon location in ancient texts, sir. It appears his apprentice stumbled upon it by accident," growled Tharandar, his dark fur and deep voice in sharp contrast with Muscio, who was blind with rage.

"This was no accident! Lughus and his apprentice have scanned these texts for years, yet found no reference to them before. He must have had help!" continued Muscio, still screaming.

"We kept a close watch on them, and there was no help," spoke Tharandar, knowing full well that there was no point in arguing. It was moments like this that he regretted submitting to the King, and moments like this where he was pleased to know that his species' loyalty lay with him, not with this incompetent ball of fur.

"Send in your scouts, I need information about their current plans! And find out who assisted them!" With this order, Tharandar left the throne room, leaving Muscio to continue his pacing and muttering.

Instructing his scouts, Tharandar toyed with the idea of disposing of Muscio. He had brought power to Solum, but was intend to increase his power, and willing to sacrifice anything to make that happen. Tharandar shook his head, clearing his mind of such thoughts. *We will make sure that never happens*, was all he could tell himself before disappearing into the dark night.

### The Expedition

Camalus had gathered his team. Included in the crew were Lughus and Lelantos, who knew the location of the Halcyon, his chief scout Cerunnos the eagle, and Coturnia, who would serve as the leader. Camalus would have led the expedition himself, but the kingdom needed its king. A small group of Cerunnos' elite scouts would join them, but no soldiers were welcome. Camalus had insisted on this, since he believed bringing soldiers could anger the Halcyon, something he could not afford to do. Halfway into the discussion on which path to take, a black figure approached Cerunnos' nest, which had served as the headquarters of the expedition.

Cerunnos was first to spot it, and immediately flew towards the black figure, who did not appear to have malicious intentions.

“Cerunnos, stop!” screeched Camalus. Cerunnos stopped mid-flight, and escorted the black bird to Camalus.

“O great king Camalus, I am but a simple creature, requesting an audience with one so noble as yourself,” spoke the bird, kneeling before Camalus.

“Please, arise, there is no need for this. Tell us who you are and why you have come. You do not appear to have evil intentions, yet you fly into the heart of my kingdom without invitation,” spoke Camalus, calmly.

“I am called Myrrdin, and I have come bearing grave news concerning the expedition,” spoke the crow. The mention of the expedition shocked all those present, except Camalus, who proceeded with his questions.

“What is this grave news you speak of?” asked Camalus.

“You cannot trust this creature!” interferred Cerunnos. “His kind have been stealing our eggs and murdering our young for centuries! Please tell me you do not intend to let this creature live?”

“I am well aware of their history, Cerunnos, and their past deeds. Yet this single bird chose to come into our home bearing knowledge of something he should not have known. I will hear him out at least, and if his intentions are indeed peaceful, he will be allowed to return home,” replied Camalus. Coturnia let out a brief shriek, indicating her agreement with Camalus. This is why Camalus had become king of Caelia, and why the kingdom had flourished under his rule. The calm mind of a true leader, speaking on behalf of her people, and disregarding any personal emotion.

“Do not fulfil your duties to the cat-king, for it will be your undoing. We have seen it. Continuing on this path will bring destruction to Caelia, and you will be unable to stop it. We have seen it. Camalus, you have ruled this kingdom with wisdom and kindness, something rare in kings. We ask that you use your wisdom now, and heed our warning, for if you do not, all will be lost. This is all we have seen, and all we can say. We implore you to use wisdom, and save Caelia.” With these words Myrrdin flapped his wings and flew off into the sky. The gathering seemed shocked by this prophecy, and Lelantos was the first to recover.

“Save Caelia?” said Lelantos. “How would this expedition destroy Caelia?”

This was the collective thought occupying their minds. However, Camalus had become aware of another presence, this one being familiar.

“What are your thoughts, Cerridwen?” asked Camalus. Cerridwen emerged from the shadows, her black coat of feathers as ominous as always.

“I do not know what to make of this. The crows have always been an enigmatic species, and little is known about them. Most consider them petty thieves, but their elder circle uses a ritual which allows them access to the spirit world. Their visions are rarely shared, especially by one such as Myrrdin. I have heard of him, and he is part of the elder circle. However, I do not understand why they would sense a danger to Caelia. Refusing Muscio's request will surely bring war to Caelia, as he is already displeased with us, and a refusal would give him the reason he needs to invade Caelia. It would appear you have no choice, Camalus. If you refuse the quest, Caelia will be plunged into war. For the sake of your kingdom and people, you must continue with the expedition. I suggest Coturnia stays behind, and I will take her place. You will need Coturnia to keep an eye on the kingdom, and my vast knowledge may be of use on the expedition,” hooted Cerridwen.

“As always, your advice is welcome,” answered Camalus, somewhat confused due to the clarity of Cerridwen's response. It was strange for her to interfere directly, since she usually preferred staying in the dark. However, there was wisdom in her words, and Camalus agreed to continue the expedition. The planning continued well into the night, and it was agreed that they would leave for the Halcyon in two days. Cerunnos had preparations to complete, and they would need enough rest for the long journey. However, beyond the trees that encircled Caelia, a pair of bright yellow eyes were watching, and an menacing smirk slowly appeared. Camalus had just ensured Caelia's destruction.