

Omphalotus Olearius

She sees it from the window before she knows what it is. Her new husband is still sleeping. That is how she thinks of him: *her new husband*. As though he is still shiny, just off the store shelf. They have known each other now for almost a year, but they've been married for less than a month, living together these few short weeks. It's an adjustment. She moved from her apartment near the center of Decatur to his trailer on the outskirts of town. She is reminded of bathrooms like upright coffins on buses or airplanes—but there are two of them in this one, two of them navigating the same narrow space. *Which makes our love only more confined and intense*, she likes to think. She is working as a waitress while he is working as a roofer and an occasional carpenter. Money is tight. But they are happy. They have their bodies, after all, which grow hungry in the narrow space of the trailer. He arrives home from work slicked with sweat, his shoulders and neck and face fevered red from the sun, and they fall upon each other. What more could anyone want? Eventually they will have children, of course, and eventually they will build a life beyond this bed where they sleep, by necessity, in each other's arms. But for now, she imagines that their orgasms on that bed are like spirits or ghosts lifting to fill the air in the trailer all around them, to reverberate and echo. And she is thinking about these pleasures when she rises in the night to use the toilet, when she sees out the tiny window a blue-green glow perhaps ten yards from the trailer. It appears alive in pale light not far from where her new husband's pickup is parked. She gazes and gazes, perplexed. The light appears to live at the foot of a tree, the wraith of it trailing out across the ground. And not until morning does she realize it was mushrooms she was seeing, jack-o'-lanterns that, by day, appear yellowish-orange. They are growing wild from the earth, multiplying. They appear disfigured somehow, like hideous flowers, dead growths that rise into the air. She finds the sight of them unsettling, disturbing, and thoughts of them keep returning to her mind during her lunch shift at work. She is so distracted that she drops an order of wings with barbecue sauce into the lap of one of her favorite customers. She is so distracted that she doesn't see a squirrel until the final moment as she is driving home. Through the rearview mirror she watches the creature rolling toward the ditch, then lying still. The tail is twitching, but the rest of the squirrel has died. At home she

showers, then walks outside again to stare at the mushrooms. There is a smell to them—she can't decide if it is pleasant or disgusting. All she knows for certain is that the growths remind her of something decaying, something fetid, vile. She finds a shovel in the tiny, locked shed at the side of the trailer, then chops at the heads of the mushrooms, destroying them. But when she is making love that evening with her husband, she notices on his shoulder a small patch of discolored skin, the same orange-yellow hue as those mushrooms. It disturbs her. There is a smell to her husband as well, like stagnant waters. She loves him, of course, loves what he makes her feel with his body, but still she keeps gazing at his shoulder while he is thrusting, keeps studying the skin that doesn't remind of her skin at all but something unsightly, inhuman. And that night she dreams that he is standing shirtless in their miniscule kitchen, and she notices that mushrooms are growing on his back and chest and arms. They are jack-o'-lanterns, though she also notices on his legs—he is wearing shorts—what appear to be clusters of hen-of-the-woods. She is horrified by the sight, and yet he presses toward her, trying to smother her with his body. Some of the mushrooms fall to the floor and begin to wilt before her eyes, to turn black. She awakes breathing heavily. She goes into the bathroom and looks out the window, seeing the glow of more of those mushrooms, or perhaps the same ones she decapitated. The glow seems to be whispering, laughing. In the morning, her husband kisses her before he leaves for his job—it is always barely light out when he rises—and his breath is something decaying in the woods. And when that evening they go for a walk around their trailer park—they like to hike down to Lost Creek—she notices how primitive he seems beside her, as wild and feral as those mushrooms. She begins to wonder what drew her to him in the first place, why she believed it made sense that they might marry. A week passes like that. Another. She wants desperately to love him, wants to accept his body when he forces himself atop her, but she keeps thinking of those mushrooms: how they gather on the earth around the trailer. She can sense them growing there, sense them springing from the mud of the ground, springing from dead wood. Her mother used to warn her about the poison of mushrooms, how you could die from consuming them, and she imagines the mushrooms growing so thick around her that they swallow her, swallow the trailer. She can't imagine living like this much longer. From her old apartment in town, her window looked out on the YMCA. She misses that. Misses being alone inside the walls. Her husband wasn't always coming at her with his body, clinging the way mushrooms cling to the earth, staining it. But still she fears she has given herself over, will probably find the

mushrooms soon springing up in her dreams from the soft skin behind her knees, there where the legs bend, or flourishing in the moist cave of her mouth, deep beneath her tongue.