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The Same Old Story

by Mari Syrad Grieves

I reach over to the thin beaded light pull dangling beneath the pleated shade and dimly illuminate the room. I perform this familiar action by feel as it is not yet safe to open my eyes. This happens most nights. I feel again, beside the lamp, for the loose sheets of thick, textured paper and a rough, knife sharpened pencil. I get ready. In the darkness, I must be careful to line up the edges of the paper perfectly beneath my chin. I press my eyes tightly closed, feeling nauseous in the moment as always. The paper is ready. I take the pencil and with a sharp intake of breath, I use its pointed tip to separate my upper and lower lid, prying them apart to reveal the inky blackness that coats the entirety of my right eye. With the lead balanced carefully on the lower rim, like a quill in a pot of ink, I transfer the obsidian liquid to the page. As though alive, the ink stretches and thins, pulled like a spider's web from my desperate eye until words are legible on the pale face of the page.

The words are tumbling now, too fast for me to catch them all, my cheeks are stained as if I had been crying tears of tar. Panic sets in. If I cannot catch all the words, the story will be incomplete and I will be forced to start all over again. Or worse, if I keep a word, even by accident in the recesses of my eye, then the insects will come, covering every inch of my skin, their only job to burrow in and carry the words out against my will. It is almost impossible, this endless letting of bile, but I have no choice. Night after night, the story must be told.