

KARENA BAKAS

Destroying Angel



Poetry Contest Runner-Up

Be careful when mushroom-picking.
That white membrane,
The Universal Veil.
*The prickle of his cheeks rubs my face-skin,
tingling, almost raw, my lips—*
Slice them in half, they say, to check—
“Can you feel it?” I ask him, then.
*“Yes.” He’s solemn. He can switch
to that completely. His eyes, they
slice longitudinally.
cut right through my flesh.*

Ectomycorrhizal relationships:

I occupy that sliver left

between our mouths.

symbiotic with the roots of trees, extracellularly,

“I want us to become one”

Eyes scour me unapologetically,

steadier than I’ve ever seen—

“Me too.”

Foreheads fused,

mutualistically.

The fungus has constant access to the sugars

made by the leaves, sent to their roots.

dropping all self-protective instincts,

The roots gain

heightened capacity for absorption,

breathing each other’s air,

higher tolerance to contamination:

neither moving to prevent a fall,

nor to brace ourselves for it—

Survivorship, or growth.

Almost afraid of that at first, his gaze:

now I drink the rush it gives.

Like standing at a precipice,

like that moment of insanity

on a bike—let go

*of handlebars! Arms thrown
out wide, we're reveling
in that infinity-second
of vulnerability—*

Symptoms don't appear until the toxins are already absorbed—
Damage is irreversible.