

*Before displacement*

**Maria Kardel**

\*

**Yellow-bellied toads**

In April, they returned to spawn near our allotment,  
An annual event Father interpreted as a sign, or blessing.  
We used the water, jelly-thick, in simple rituals,  
Believing it would make the seeds sprout fat and strong.  
This toad magic pulled scallion leaves out of bulbs,  
Taught sunflowers to rotate and reddened the raspberries.  
In their wisdom, they told us that our hollow was *special*,  
Our water was earthier and more mineral.  
Half-submerged in the deepest pool (where children could drown)  
The toads, muddy mothers, observed the land,  
Ready to flash the violent, fiery swirls on their bellies,  
Urging intruders to *leave our place alone*.

\*\*

**Dydko**

*(a minor Slavic demon)*

On the hill, marked with the scarecrow of a pylon,  
There lived a wild man inside a hollow tree.  
He spoke to snakes, left offerings for forgotten souls.  
To call him, we'd cross ourselves,  
Spit three times, pray, swear  
By the cloven hooves, the horned head.  
We saw him sometimes. At noon,  
In the shadow of a bearded willow –  
A face, made of mushrooms,  
Hair of reed, teeth of slate, feet  
Dragging on clumps of mud, mouth open,  
Screaming in animal pain.

\*\*\*

**A world, lost**

One day, we found a fawn,  
Half-eaten, by the wildest pool,  
Where leeches ribboned, unsettled by the sticks  
We moistened before probing under  
The speckled hide.  
The fawn, turned over, looked,  
Half-alive. A strange being, its eye  
A knowing keyhole into *the other world*:

**Poetry**

**Section Editors:**

Ágnes Lehóczky  
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Pia Dela Cruz  
Mark Lindsey

Mina Miller  
Asha Pacey  
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**Maria Kardel**

The edges of the fields curling inward,  
Water drying in greasy puddles, roads  
Tearing into our precious, mineral earth,  
The pylon – monstrous but diminished,  
Like a king of a plundered province,  
Still the only landmark to find  
Our place, on blurry satellite view.

**Poetry**

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