

★ **Here There Are Monsters****Amelinda Bérubé**

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Eerie and otherworldly, Amelinda Bérubé's *Here There Are Monsters* creeps across the page and into the woods where Skye's younger sister has gone missing, painting a haunting picture of the sisters' relationship, but also of relationships between human beings and their own desires.

With elegant and terrifying wood creatures reminiscent of Guillermo del Toro, the story seems simple: about a girl lost in the swampy woods as her sister lay sleeping. But these are not ordinary girls. Between them, they have created kingdoms. In their flights of powerful fancy, Deirdre is a queen and Skye is her protector.

Skye had begun to reject the games, wanting a normal life—friends, trips to the mall, and a boyfriend. Deirdre tried to reengage her sister, but ended up drawing more deeply into her imaginary spaces in the woods. When the scrim between the imaginative world and the actual one thins and breaks, each sister chooses the kind of life she wants for herself.

The forest encroaches throughout, a menacing space with the potential to extend its boundaries at will. This setting amplifies the darkness within both girls and their decisions. As Deirdre says, “It’s like it’s been waiting for us. It feels *alive*. Like a dryad forest.”

The language reads like poetry, attentive to sounds and stark images. When Deirdre sits among the detritus of the forest, trying to construct her monsters from sticks, bones, and leaves, her loneliness and strangeness are palpable. Though Bérubé engages a kind of fantasy world, she is still attentive to the social structure at play for teenagers, and her clever use of imaginative elements highlights the crisis of understanding oneself.

Thick with atmosphere and tension, *Here There Are Monsters* does what fairy tales do: it edifies as it terrifies.

CAMILLE-YVETTE WELSCH (July/August 2019)

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