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## Two lies

Gwen Watts

Here are two lies: No wolves ever lived among the sheep, and the Greek gods are dead. You believe this because you are walking down a street, cracked pavement, blue sky stretching like a bruise, the sun is shining. Nothing false can ever happen under that sun, someone once said, it is our only truth, and you believe this, fickle fingers and an old ignorance, a single candle illuminating your way in the dark.

Here is the truth: you are not alone in the dark. Hades is there, with you, smoke billowing from his lips, dirt staining the hem of his jeans, dried blood underneath his fingernails. He is the loneliness of the homeless, the desperation of the poor, cracked pipes, shadows that have faces, teenagers who are too young for any of this, bad breath. He is the happiness of a beggar as a stranger presses a dollar into their hand; he relies upon the kindness of others to live. Hades is also here, in you, a ticking time bomb, light spilling into the room, a crescendo.

Hades is a child, walking on the edge of a footpath, perhaps he will fall, but perhaps he will fly, it all comes down to the inevitable spin of the dice, dancing.

Who else is there, you must wonder now — Aphrodite, Apollo, Hera, Ares, Artemis. They are living in your skin. It's worth living in. They are under everyone's skin, creaking ships and deserted houses, overgrown gardens where the flowers mix with weeds until both become one. Who is the infection and who is the

infector? Who came first, the god or the man? Perhaps both breathe together, two thin threads of life entwined, a bridge between the immortals and the perishable.

They walk with you, bones brittle with the ageing of centuries, words mixed with the old language and the new, rusted Latin, street talk. Aphrodite is the first boy you kissed, sunlight crowning his head, a softness, a tenderness. The purpose of porcelain is that it shatters. The purpose of love is that it fades. Artemis is the laughter of your girlfriends at midnight, confessions spilling hot over dried lips, a hunger for beauty, a hunger for closeness, the spillage of paint against concrete, brightness in juxtaposition to the inevitable dark. You can't see them, the old gods, but that doesn't mean they aren't there. Ask a blind man. Ask a child.

Speaking of children, Hera. She comes to you at sixteen first, someone talking about ovaries and eggs and hope and something fading, old jeans. She stays with you, twenty-four, thirty-six, the echo of a child's laughter, small fingers around your wrists, the smell of apple pie. Of all the gods, she and Hades are the most faithful. Theirs is an old loneliness, the ancient religion of humanity's despairs, an absence of hope, the echo of those left behind. Hera is monochrome, Frank Sinatra dribbling in through the night, nostalgia for who you are and a reminder of what you want, what you could have had, faded photographs.

Ares will find you somewhere in the midst of your teenage years, and he will live inside of you, poison in the place of blood, a tragedy of skin and bone and thought, something bitter tying it all together. His are the words you use in the places of fists, the sound of a slap, the debris of childhood. You come across him when you find that word, shrapnel, in a history textbook, fragments of a bomb the description reads, and you think: fragments of a soul. Your father gets cancer at fourteen and it starts there, growing, a rotten seed inside of you. (You find out later that shrapnel was named after the guy who invented it, and you wonder if he knows

about the graveyard he created with his bare hands.) Ares is everywhere, a conviction of everyday abhorrence.

Later, you are introduced to Apollo in a second-hand bookshop. He is a kindness, fingers against piano keys, dancing barefoot with your sisters in the kitchen to old music, an old song, something your grandparents listened to once. He is a peace you had not previously known, the sky devoid of false city lights, seeing the stars for the first time. He is the act of holding hands, the way your best friend looks when she smiles at you, the laziness of the morning, reading prayers in the afternoon. You like him the best. He does not come often. When he does come, there is a shiftlessness to the orange sky that night, as the sky sheds itself of another horizon, and night and day blur into one. He is senseless, twirling a sunflower between his fingers, you could almost love this one. Do not forget his immorality, he is a god and you are a human and, although all the prophets are dead and Rome has crumbled to dust, it will not end well.

There are more to come — Iris, Zeus, Poseidon, Persephone, Hephaestus: whispers of life, death, anything and everything in-between.

Here are two lies: No wolves ever lived among the sheep and the Greek gods are dead.

And — a truth:

These stories will last forever.



**Gwen Watts** wrote this in 2015 when she was in Year 11 at St Scholastica's College in New South Wales.