

A Guide to Everlasting

Jona L. Pedersen

Step 1. To make something last forever, you must first kill a vulture. The best way to do it is with a rifle, but if you're out of bullets, work with what you have—a pocketknife, your nails, your old baby teeth. They're still in the old music box your parents put them in, when you still believed in the tooth fairy. Just make sure that, once you've killed the vulture, its carcass is still intact.

Step 2. Find the highest point over the graveyard. Usually this is the church bell tower. But if there is no church, the nearest water tower will do. If you resort to the latter, remember that you can't climb the threshold of water, air, and earth, without bringing fire. Always keep a matchstick box with you, in case the vultures snuff your flame. They're watching you now. Circling you. Waiting.

Step 3. Hang the carcass by its talons from your chosen apex. Be gentle, so that the ankles don't break. Be gentle, because it's a dead thing, and you were the one who killed it. Be gentle, because you never know what comes back to haunt you. But, oh, hungry heart, hush, what is another ghost anyway? Wire its wings as if it still soars the sweltering skies. Leave it hanging overnight.

Step 4. All the other vultures will leave. They love death and dance with death and live with death, but they can't stand to see the death of their own. But you must. You can't have a vulture heart. You can't circle the graveyard. You can't linger forever, cowering on the perimeters. No one will invite you.

Step 5. You are not a vulture. You do not have a vulture heart. You have a kitchen. A kitchen with memories of scents. You think it could be tortilla flour, or sometimes, rhubarb soup. Sometimes you think it's vulture. The rot still follows you. But you are not a vulture. Scraps and memories won't nourish you.

Step 6. You are not a vulture. You are not a vulture. There are other meals to cook. There are other ways to fly. There are other ways to last. You are not a vulture.

Step 7. The vultures are gone. Once you're ready, you will know where to go. She won't be there. They will tell you that she's watching. They say she watches all of us. But when that feels too much like another vulture, you avoid thinking about it. That's okay. You just have to be. It's only after you leave the graveyard that you will find her. She will be in the kitchen, sifting through all the blueberries you picked together. When you stand next to her, you're barely tall enough to reach over the counter. But you do. And you start picking the leaves from the berries, staining your fingertips purple. This is how you make it last.

Jona L. Pedersen grew up in Norway, but has since relocated to the US where they are pursuing English and biology at the University of North Dakota. Weaving contemporary culture with old myths, Jona's fiction and poetry unveil the spaces in between reality and dreaming. Passions such as wildlife biology, entomology, and environmental justice also inspire their writing. For more about their work, check out their Twitter (@JonaLPedersen) or website (www.jonalpedersen.com).