

CLOTH BRIDGE

Exclusion had been the last straw for Maude. Contrary to legend, climbing up the mountain had not polluted the site, nor had it turned her into stone. Maybe her calves had gotten a little stiff, but still, she'd been able to keep walking, drawing herself up from base to peak, a familiar maneuver given the bent of her particular expertise. Discovered other women up there, too. Officiating.

Someone had been lying to her, and for a very long time.

So, this is where the men went when they were supposed to be working. All of the many design setbacks, launch delays, testing failures, budget overruns, all of it, all along, had been a made up ruse on account of their preoccupation with... whatever this was supposed to be. Admittedly, she could see the appeal. It was no wonder most projects never arrived at a state of completion. No wonder the contractors' club in the mancamp remained deserted. How could anyone down there hope to compete with *this*? And on top of it all they drew a regular paycheck from Mold Industries, Inc. She was paying their salaries.

Nobody was happy to see her arrive atop the mountain. Plinth, of course, was swaddled in sycophants, showing out in a repurposed shrine that now bulged at the seams with all of his usual comforts. Postmodern furniture, a loyal opposition, and he'd tasked his personal narrator with documenting the event *sans serif*. She'd been taking all of this in when Piro snuck up behind her and slowly lowered a visor over her head, into her line of sight, like a blindfold, compromising her interpretation of the scene. Instinctively she blinked, her mind and body rejecting the instrument as one.

When her eyes popped open again she was back in her apartment, jacketed in black mold.

BLOOD POOL HELL

Her period had started up again for the first time in nearly fifty years.

Maude rummaged in the cabinets for a clean mug, toppling several wine glasses in the process. She crunched over the broken glass in her slippers and wandered into the living room, worrying absentmindedly at her tea. Collapsed onto the couch. Defeated, but still clinging to her numerous complaints.

Her visor chirped.

Mímir's disembodied head appeared, floating before her, demanding a status update on the Plinth project.

Of course.