

be disgruntled either, or primed for disillusionment or failure. And at the very first hint of something even just barely starting to go wrong, I'd call the veterinarian; I'd take them in. My former home gone, my children grown, I'd be clear with myself—from now on, it's just my axolotls and me.

Of course, in other, subtler respects, it's a relief not to have to visit, in the home that is no longer mine, the rooms that once were the boys' rooms, filled with boy things. If I lived there still, what would I have done with all those rooms? You can only use so many guest rooms; I already had an office. No doubt the boy things would just be gathering dust, awaiting visitations from their prior owners, just as my own girl things await me in my home of origin whenever I visit my parents. How strange those things are now, the wallpaper I chose, eccentric even in the sixties, the antiwar memorabilia, now antique.

Even here, in the absence of rooms empty of boys but full of their things, there's almost too much space for only one person. So much space can be a problem if you're not careful, even if it's filled with light. So much space can feel like the emptiness it is.

If I were to fill my home with axolotls, we'd be full up here. But what kind should they be? You can get them in so many genetically altered colors—royal blue, deep purple, golden albino. Some even glow in the dark. Most common—the leucistic—are pinkish. Pink becomes me in my later years.

From the right angles, axolotls look enough like you and me to be good company—a creature both from here and not. Of course, they'd have each other, too, and would spend their days visiting among themselves, just as the boys used to play with their friends, creating a generous feeling of companionability. They'd stop their gabbing, though, whenever I came back, looking at me with their curious eyes and pressing the flats of their padded feet to their glass in a welcoming, hospitable way, silently opening the pale-pink Os of their mouths to welcome me home.

Katharine Haake's most recent work is a chapbook of fabulist parables from Gold Line Press, *Assumptions We Might Make About the Postworld*. Her other books include an eco-dystopian science fiction fable, *The Time of Quarantine*; a hybrid California prose lyric, *That Water, Those Rocks*; and three collections of short stories. She is a graduate of University of California, Santa Cruz, and teaches at California State University, Northridge.

STEPHANIE MARTIN

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