

## Excerpts from *50 Beasts to Break Your Heart*

by GennaRose Nethercott

### **Delilinia**

The Delilinia is best known for its musk—a sweet perfume akin to rosewater met with honey and smoke. Serpentine with a golden headdress, it makes a home in blackberry thickets, building its nest in the briar. Poachers hunt it with long iron hooks, so they may bottle and stopper the scented oil tucked in the hollow behind its eyes. For those foolish enough to purchase a vial of Delilinia oil in a back-alley medicine show, ennui is inevitable. Merely a dab upon the wrists will drive the wearers to abandon their sweethearts and children. They will lock themselves in attics and do nothing but carve strange glyphs into the walls, and refuse all food save for sweetcakes and elderwine. When the perfume is spent, they will scramble for years along esplanades of foreign cities in search of a peddler carrying the perfume. They will never find one.

### **Panx**

Everyone remembers the schoolyard game: Count a Panx's teeth by hand, pressing a fingertip to one, then the next, then the next. While counting, recite the alphabet. When your finger pricks with blood, the letter last spoken will begin the name of the next person you'll love. The game ends by letting the Panx lap the blood off. Return to counting. The number of licks it takes to clean your finger is the number of years before your darling stops loving you. If after a hundred licks the Panx has to be dragged away snarling, unfinished, then you know how lucky you'll be.

## **Tomen**

Spidered on eight legs, each shin long as a wheat stalk, the Tomen is more cauldron than not. Its body is an open basin. It fills with storm water, with errant rodents lured to drowning, with sparrow bones and fallen leaves from the sugar maple. Dip a ladle into the tub and sip— bitter as grapefruit left unripe in the root cellar, but it will cure a fever in a pinch. Tomens are ever scuttling through backyards, positioning their bodies beneath fledgling-fat nests and clumsy roofers, hoping a snack might fall from the sky.

## **Albit**

They come when the snow comes, but leave no footprints. No shadow will settle on them. They are wan as buttermilk, narrow as a flagpole, as if the whole body is a pale arm, reaching. Note how they crane over ice banks, their eyes large as billiard balls, their breath steaming. In some cultures, far from here, they believe that Albits are the ghosts of villagers taken by fever during winters past. Not living to see spring, they are doomed to lope evermore through snowdrifts, yearning for warmth. The scientific community dismisses such farfetched lore. Albits are just like any other animal, despite what they, or anyone else, might insist.

## **Larial**

The Larial was not always so hungry. Old lore says the first Larial awoke to find it had eaten its lover in the night, and has been ravenous ever since. When the Larial feeds, it unbuckles the leather belt keeping its jaw closed. Its mouth falls slack and its seven arms begin to fill the mouth with crop. The Larial eats anything earthen. It strips boughs from sycamore, devours river stones and soil, and swallows deer skeletons abandoned on the

forest floor. Its appetite bores holes through mountains and empties lakes. Once the Larial has eaten its fill, it holds its seven hands to the sun and waits. Soon, the rain will come. Soon, the hands will sprout alive. When they do, wildflowers bound up from the flesh, and the seven hands become gardens.