

Ellysian Press

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Announcing Marissa Byfield's THE SOFT FALL, a retelling of ancient Roman mythology with a twist of lycanthropy, featuring a heroine inspired by a goddess and a diverse cast of characters

About *The Soft Fall*

Demon wolves roam the forest, the villagers all said. Dianna had been warned to stay away.

She didn't listen.

Now every full moon Dianna slinks into the cellar beneath the barn. Into the cage made by her brother to protect her secret. One that would get her burned at the stake by the village leaders if discovered.

The heirs to the throne disappear just as their enemies lay siege to the empire. Famine hits the village as it struggles to survive. Dianna does what she can to hunt and help. But her secret is discovered when she transforms during an attack.

Captured and imprisoned, Dianna must find a way to escape. If she does, she has only one direction to go. Into the heart of the forest where she was cursed.



The Soft Fall e-book and paperback versions will be available at online retailers on 10/29/2019.

You can pre-order *The Soft Fall* here: <https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B07Z8FZ6YL>

About Marissa Byfield



Marissa Byfield was raised in the lush woodlands of the Pacific Northwest. After graduating with a Bachelor's degree in English from Oregon State University, Marissa married her high school sweetheart and finished writing her fantasy novel, *The Soft Fall*, inspired by her love of mythology and wolves.

Marissa has been a longtime bookseller and the newsletter editor at Grass Roots Books & Music, Oregon's second oldest independent bookstore. When not writing or reading, you'll find her practicing yoga, musing over tarot by full moonlight, shelving at her local library, and fighting hate with love. She lives in Oregon with her husband.

Marissa Byfield Q&A

Why do we need another retelling of Roman mythologies?

When it comes to mythology, many figures in the Roman pantheon are one-dimensional. Their stories are shrouded in uncertainty or lost in history, so we know little of who they are, except for what angers or pleases them – important if you’re a pious ancient Roman! There’s still so much room in their characterization to unpack and explore. I wanted to imagine more complete narratives with the fantastical angle of lycanthropy, given the wolf imagery in these myths. What if Romulus and Remus weren’t raised by a she-wolf, but cursed to become wolves? What if the goddess Diana the Huntress didn’t kill Actaeon with her hounds, but in her own wolfish form? *THE SOFT FALL* began to coalesce from there.

The setting of *THE SOFT FALL* is greatly inspired by imperial Rome. Have you traveled to research the book?

I had the incredible and humbling experience of backpacking through Rome, where the Empire of Myre is based on. Ancient cults were dedicated to worshipping Diana the Huntress, and I wanted to pay respects to her origins and capture the sensations I felt there. I kept my eyes open for sculptures of her. I walked among the reconstructed huts where Romans burned their hearthfires centuries ago. I stood underneath the dome of the Pantheon and felt the wind fluttering through the oculus. My favorite memory was glimpsing the wild rabbits of Palatine Hill – like the one Aimes and Dianna nurse back to health at the end of the book – who were used to tourists and had grown fat off the land. The way the ruins coexist with modern life there is surreal, and helped me begin to understand why it’s called the Eternal City!

Did you deliberately set out to subvert and/or expand upon any tropes associated with tales of lycanthropy?

I’ve always loved wolves – they’re my mother’s favorite animal, too, so I’d read much about them growing up. But they’re misrepresented and maligned in both fiction and reality. Werewolves are traditionally the stuff of horror, and lupine characters the stuff of villainy in fairy tales, even though actual wolves rarely attack humans.

From the first chapter, when Dianna is just a girl, everything she knows to be true changes. She’s been forbidden to leave the safety of her village or venture into the dark and dangerous woods, but by the end of the book, she’s learned her village is a trap and the woods are a sanctuary, essentially. I wanted to subvert the concept of werewolves in the same way – the monsters turn out to be the heroes.

Wolves have astonishingly human qualities, so my desire to see more realistic wolves in fiction meant humanizing the werewolves in my book. The wolfpack had to be a cohesive family, rather than a hierarchical structure based on subjugation. Each of them represent different parts of a social imperative – Ram in his sense of leadership, Eccka in her protectiveness, Fredric in his playfulness, Aimes in his healing, and Dianna in her providing. They embody those concepts individually, but putting those skills together, they thrive as a collective community.

One of the main forces of antagonism in your book is the theocracy dictating Awl-Feth, as well as a brutal imperial war. What do you think makes these conflicts appealing to readers?

I find that the Roman empire's political influence and eventual demise is prescriptive in that history repeats itself – there's the ever-present question of whether our modern governmental systems can learn from those abuses of power, ethnic prejudices, polarization and elitism. There are certainly dystopian nuances in my book that make it a timely allegory for political tyranny, expressing the damaging effects of puritanical conservatism on a society in particular.

Book market-wise, Americans are reading up on current injustices, but we're also picking up hopeful fiction that will capture our hearts and lead us out of the wreckage. *THE SOFT FALL* is ultimately a deeply hopeful story. My main characters have experienced great suffering at the hands of oppressive structures – a young woman who has been suicidal, a young man who has been abused, an ex-soldier who has seen much violence, a leader who is unable to lead, and a vagrant who thinks tragedy is his destiny. But even when everything seems hopeless, there is always an undercurrent of hope, and I think that is true both in stories and in life.

How has your feminist perspective informed your characterization and plotting choices?

The myth of Diana the Huntress is considered a feminist classic – usually in the expression of her rage. My Dianna expresses her rage, too – but moreover, her frustration at her powerlessness to help others, and her drive to correct that. She's altruistic and self-sacrificing, and that is a pervasive message to young women: that we should always be nurturing. The ultimate lesson she learns is that she can't help everyone, but she can help herself. She becomes a nurturer to herself and the determiner of her own destiny.

Of course I wanted to write an empowered heroine, but also about how the patriarchy boxes young men into a corner. Aimes is a male character whose trauma physically and uncontrollably transforms him, because he's repressed his emotions for so long. One of the first things he learns and absorbs, as a child, is “do not feel.” And that is an incredibly pervasive message to young men that has somehow become socially acceptable, when it's really one of the biggest problems facing society today. It has real consequences on the psyche. So his arc is about coming to terms with himself and with the decision to reject toxic masculinity.

I also think feminist stories need not be devoid of romantic entanglement. Awl-Feth represents emotional stagnancy, so from a young age Dianna rejects romantic love as something she can't have. The resolution of both Dianna and Aimes's internal conflicts is finally being able to set their emotional selves free. That's a feminist message.

How would you categorize *THE SOFT FALL* and its intended audience?

THE SOFT FALL is especially for readers who love mythology but seek a more unexpected and emotionally resonant adventure. And for readers who love fantasy that feels like coming home, despite an unfamiliar world. I didn't feel pressure to write the story on a grander scale, because it's not about the war at large – it's about the war within the war, and how its consequences create a ripple effect.

Dianna may be young, but hers is a coming of age story, and that's a process in which anyone can find something to relate to. Each of the characters must “come of age” in their own way – everyone battles their own demons. So it's for readers who feel like exploring that, too.

What main message do you hope THE SOFT FALL will convey?

I wrote most of the book in the year I spent almost entirely unknown in a new state, having moved across the country with my husband. Not that I needed it to write, but that sense of anonymity gave me a kind of cathartic space to say “yes, this is what I need to do.”

Much of the book’s writing process was born out of isolation and research about loneliness. I think one of the cornerstones of the human condition is that when people who are vastly different come to rely on each other for survival, they can discover they’re not so different after all. Dianna loses her real family and serendipitously finds solace in her found family, but that solace is packaged as, “we’re just as lost as you are, but we’re lost together.”

I once read an anecdote about two inmates in solitary confinement, once provided access between cells, reaching out to grasp each other’s hands. That’s one of the main themes of the book, and if it serves as a hand for someone to hold, then I’ve done my job.