

AN OLD BOOK

by Brad Reed

I notice its spine, the title long since worn off, and cradle it down from its place on the shelf.

I trace the elaborate image etched into its cover with the tip of my finger and feel the way it recedes into the hardboard.

I open it delicately to the smell of must from a century ago and let it fill my lungs like perfume from a fond memory.

My eyes drink in the sloppy ink burrowed into thick pages, its tall letters standing at the ready like actors waiting for the curtain,

and feel the brittle yellowed texture of the paper between my fingers, as though spun on a loom.

I take care with the tattered corners, the failing binding from a hundred explorers who came to this place before me.

I puzzle over a word underlined in faded pencil here, a haphazard drawing in the margin there.

I fan its pages with my thumb, listening to the flutter of ancient paper, and feel the forgotten stories fall out of it in a breeze on my face.

A book like this reads itself to me, playing its own part in the story.