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Wilson Hannalei
Alden Hughes
Hanl Schumaker Jo
Julianna Kelly
Willie Lou
Jenna Martello
Grace McGrain
Madeleine Meredith
Catherine Monroy
Hannah Nevitt
Nineteenth
Meridian Ondrejka
Emily Orendain
Sylveo Paris
Vandana Pawar
Shellie Revilla
Ian Ross
Solana Salinas
Eric Scoles
Colleen Shannon
Snot
Karen Usatine**

VOICES / SPRING 2022 / WEST VALLEY COLLEGE

SPRING 2022



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West Valley College

VOICES

Voices is a literary and arts magazine that showcases the diverse voices of West Valley College. It is published once every spring, and is produced by the members of the Voices staff and English 80 & 81. Current students, alumni, faculty, and staff of West Valley College are invited to submit their works of original fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, and art for publication.

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We would also like to thank West Valley College and the West Valley English Department for their help and support.

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VOICES

LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE

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THREE GRACES

SHELLIE REVILLA

THE GLITCH

Zoë Arnold



There was a glitch in the world, and Karai knew it.

She could feel it, a dry thread of smoke leaking into the world. The world wasn't supposed to feel dry. It felt deep and oily with magic, each fairy and hobgoblin and drake seeping with the stuff. It covered your skin, your hair, and in some places it was so thick your hair moved like it was in water. Those sensitive enough could identify individuals based on the smell of their magic alone. Several studies had tried to determine why one's magic smelled a certain way, but the results were inconsistent and far-fetched. Most magicals had their own hypothesis. Some thought it was your past, some thought it was your future, and some thought it smelled of one's soulmate.

Which Karai found ridiculous. There was only one theory that held up. She believed that magic smelled of dreams. An aspiring astronaut might smell like the musty insides of a spacecraft, a child might smell like the parent they wish to emulate. But some dreams are less predictable. Some might never understand why their magic smells the way it does. Some don't know what their smell is.

Karai took a moment to feel the oily warmth slumbering inside her cells. She let it pool in her hands, bringing it close before inhaling deep. She'd never smelled the same thing anywhere else. She asked friends, family, colleagues, but no one could place it.

VOICES

She shook the daze from her head and the magic from her fingertips. No point in muddling about with magic when that — whatever the dry intrusion was — was in the world. It felt like her New York street corner smelled, like sewage. Or pot. She grimaced, but the too-dry feeling wouldn't go away.

Are those teens trying necromancy again? She glared into the sunlit street below her, where the neighbor's kid and his friends sat, jeering at pedestrians and teaching each other crap spells they found on Reddit.

But Karai knew what she felt wasn't necromancy. It was something much, much worse. She grabbed her yellow rain boots, a sweater, and her bag as she headed for the door. With a deep breath and a tilt of her chin, she turned the knob and stepped into the world beyond.

She'd find it. She'd find it, whatever it was, and only one of them would walk out alive.

FRIDA KAHLO

MADELEINE MEREDITH



PILLS PILLS PILLS

MADELEINE MEREDITH



PERSEPHONE ISN'T GREEK

Zoë Arnold

Persephone isn't Greek
She lives on a different coast, a different holy mountain
And her story is a happy one

Rather than plucking a narcissus from the soil
She tucks sourgrass blossoms behind her ears
Oxalis pes-caprae, she learns
But memories of elementary school munching fit much better
than this foreign latin poetry

For half her nights, she dreams below
But it is not that she doesn't see the sky
She and Hades traipse through sun-lit grasses
Daily while she stays. Together, but not bound
Rarely lost, ever found

Her pomegranate seeds are replaced
With tea, pistachios, eggs, sandwiches
Cereals and granolas and combinations
She hadn't tried before
She was granted a stay

VOICES

Hades opened the Underworld's doors as a shelter
So Persephone's tired feet would have fewer
Steps to take before hitting a bed
When the cheery blues and whites of day
Chased Apollo behind the horizon

CREPES

Wilson Hannalei

The first one is always wrong.
It leaves the fire strange, mottled. Too pale and watery,
Thin and raw and doughy and stiff.

(It is 1:45 AM. An early night.)

The first crepe settles onto the plate. It's speckled with gold on
the upper left side.

I stare at it fondly. My mouth waters.

I stir the bowl, reminding the batter to be patient. I pour it into
the pan.

It doesn't sizzle. For as thin and light as it is, a puddle of liquid,
It settles heavily. I reach for the pan.

(It is 1:47 AM. I can't remember the last time I made crepes.)

The anxiety is brief and unforgiving. Will I remember?

This is the second crepe. I already have. I already do.

I pick up the pan. The batter is burning.

I swirl the wet left slowly, without thought. It blankets the
softened edges.

I watch as the edges slowly lift. I carefully scratch at them,
delicate little lifts until the whole peels
from the heat.

I flip it. The upper left corner is a light golden brown.

VOICES

It's always harder to tell when the topside is down. The edges can't lift twice.

The batter is burning. The crepe settles onto the plate. It is mottled with brown like an infection.

(It is 1:51AM. I am the only one awake again.)

I have poured the batter. I have watched it cook. The edges darken and lift.

I flip it. The underside is all a uniform brown.

I watch it cook. I pretend I smell it burning.

If I lift my fingers to my nose, I can smell the vanilla extract. It always spills.

The pan is too hot for inaction.

I don't adjust the fire. I pour the batter.

It will burn. I know it will. I will watch it.

(It is 1:54 AM. The batter is halfway gone.)

I am craving waffles. I saw the whipped cream when I opened the fridge, searching without

seeing. I tasted a phantom sweetness.

To make waffles, I use the mixer. I have to. My hands aren't enough to whip egg whites.

It's very loud.

Crepes are quiet. They settle into the pan without even a sizzle.

I'm lying. They sizzle now. Just a little, as the pan becomes hotter.

That's alright. It's a very quiet sizzle. I'll still be the only one awake in the end.

VOICES

(It is 1:57 AM. I desperately want strawberries, cut into lengthwise fours.)

The season isn't right. The pot out back is quiet and cold. Under the winter weeds I can spot new growth, small and vibrantly green.

Any strawberry I eat now will be dissatisfying at best.

The future gives us strawberries during any season. They are bitter and sour.

All I found were blackberries. Eight of them, on the verge of going bad. I don't like blackberries.

I am waiting for June. July. May, even. I am waiting for my phone to ring.

I know what I'll say. I've been planning it. Dreaming of it, every single night.

Come over, I'll say. You're so close, again. Just walk on over.

Sit at my table, I'll say. Do you want the blackberry jam, or the peach preserves I made? I'll let you have a spoonful of the apricot if you really want it.

Pick whatever you want, I'll say. I'll feed you.

(It is 2:04 AM. I miss someone who never left.)

I burned this one too. It's barely hanging on by its fingernails to be brown.

I didn't even notice. I was staring at... nothing. Nothing at all.

It hisses and pops on the pan. I should have lowered the heat. I flip the crepe.

There's enough batter for one more. It is the twin of the first: misshapen and ugly. Not enough to fill the pan, not enough to waste.

VOICES

It will be burnt. It will be dark and stiff.
It will be warm where it settles onto the plate.

(It is 2:14AM. The crepes are delicious.)

WORKSTATION

MADELEINE MEREDITH



REFLECTION

SHELLIE REVILLA



FUTURE

Emily Orendain

I gaze down at the world from above,
The sound of silence thick and cold,
The sun's passage against the sky
A fruitless race with no finish line,
And I wonder what the Future thinks
Of how we scream.

Will they think us weak for all our hasty scissors,
Cutting out who we once were
and scattering the pieces in a web of lies
In hopes they'll think us wise?

Or will they even see us in the web,
Tangled as we are in time?
Perhaps we'll be but shadows, burnt away
By what the men of now will say.

Perhaps the Future doesn't care,
And won't think of us at all, despite
How much they will rely
on what we will have done.

Perhaps they see not shattered bits,
Or shadows or remembered shouts,
Perhaps they see themselves in drips,
Their own face looking out,
Reflected from before.

I BLINK

Ian Ross

I blink and there are creatures staring back at me.
Impossible unexplainable beings behind my eyelids that float fly
swim walk
They hold unintelligible conversations that contain the meaning
of the world
Unexplored lands stretch as far as the eye can't see
I want to stay here forever, lost in the wonders behind my eyes
but how can I when my eyes stay closed for a fraction of a
fraction of a second
My eyes open
I make my decision.
and then
I blink.

GRAFFITO

SOLANA SALINAS



VALID AFFAIRS

SOLANA SALINAS



STARLIGHT

Meridian Ondrejka

Samantha sat on her bed with a sigh. Her day had been long and hard and right now the only thing that she possibly wanted to do was lay down. But she found that for some reason she couldn't. She found for some reason, all she wanted to do was open her window and step out onto her flat roof. With an equally deep sigh as the one that had brought her down on the bed, Samantha stood and walked to the linen cabinet to grab a blanket.

The one she pulled down was a deep navy blue, with strange runes embroidered in a silver thread around the edge. It also happened to reek of magic. Samantha recoiled slightly from the powerful stench that had permeated the closet. She gently set the picnic blanket back in its place and pulled down the small bottle that hung from the ceiling. Within it was a number of herbs and flowers, all tied together with a piece of red string. All of which looked scorched. Gently uncorking it, Samantha used two fingers to fish the contents out of the bottle and drop them into the nearby trash can. Samantha poked a hand into her laundry room to grab a freshly tied sprig of new herbs and fresh flowers which she delicately set back within the glass bottle. She then re-corked the bottle and tied it back to the thread hanging from the ceiling. As soon as the intricate set of knots were done, and the bottle hung on its own again, the red thread binding the herbs and flowers began to glow a pale red. The hue was almost unnoticeable in the light of the hallway but Samantha saw it and smiled anyway.

VOICES

Able now to fully walk into the closet without being assured by the scent of rancid magic, Samantha once again pulled the blanket from its spot on the shelf. She walked with it to the large windows that adorned the wall of her bedroom and with a slight wave of her hand they opened, though without any perceivable hardware to allow them to do so. Crossing the newly created threshold, Samantha flicked her wrists to open the blanket and smoothed it out on the roof she now stood on. There was a slight decline, however, it did not impede her as she circled the blanket once before sitting down in the center.

Taking a deep breath, Samantha pooled her magic within herself and then let it ripple out. The runes along the edge of the blanket soaked up the released wave and began to glow. With a slight breath of trepidation, Samantha reached up to the night sky full of blinking stars. She let out her breath in a laugh as she swirled her hand through the inky black mixing it with the shining stars. Grinning, Samantha leaned back and finally laid back, falling asleep with her hands amid the milky way.

~

Samantha woke up to the sun blaring down upon her face. She stretched, careful not to pull the blanket along with her, lest it get caught on something and rip. It wasn't until she relaxed her shoulders and looked at her hands that she sighed.

“Well, fuck.”

~

Samantha was standing in her kitchen, hands in her sink, when Beth called.

VOICES

“Hey, you stood me up for lunch. You okay?”

“Hey, yah. Sorry. I figured out how to touch the sky last night.”

“Really? That’s great news, Sam! I know you’ve been stressing about that spell for months now.”

“Ugh. I don’t know what past me was thinking. It’s not all that it’s cracked up to be.”

“What, did something go wrong?!?”

“No. It’s just...”

Sam pulls her hands out of the water and stares at them. “I have stars under my fingernails now, and the moonlight won’t come off.”

As Beth’s laughter echoed out of the phone, Samantha stared at her hands. Where her perfectly manicured, but not polished, nails extended past her fingers a glowing emanate. A mix of white, yellow, red, and blue light shone from beneath her nails. As for her hands themselves, the streaks of silver moonlight swirled around her palms and reached the back of her hands. If she took one finger, she could swirl it in a direction, like a magnet controlling fluid under glass. It also extended up her arms in elegant patterns known only in nature.

And regardless of how hard Samantha scrubbed, it wasn’t coming off.

“You know, if this was you I wouldn’t be laughing.”

VOICES

“Bull Sam. You would be laughing your ass off, as I am now. Anyway, just see this as payback for when I gave my doll sentence and it tried to kill me. You remember what you were doing then, darling friend of mine?”

“Pointing and laughing?”

“Thatta girl. Pointing and laughing while Raggedy Anne chased me around with a butcher’s knife. Let me tell you, it was extremely helpful.”

“Hey, I helped. I pulled the damn thing’s head off.”

“Sure you did. But only after it had cornered me on top of one of the kitchen stools.”

Despite her current predicament, which even she had to admit was not that bad, Samantha burst out laughing.

“It kept running in circles around it because its legs were too short to jump up to any of the rungs, and it had both hands on the butcher’s knife.”

By now, both Beth and Samantha were laughing incredibly hard. Samantha finally dried her glowing hands and silver limbs, and wiped the tears from her eyes.

“Okay, okay. Give me five minutes and I will be in the car. You’re at the sushi place, right?”

“Yes, of course I am at the sushi place. It’s my week to choose the restaurant.”

VOICES

“I was just double checking! Anyway, get us a private room. I don’t have the energy to glamor a whole restaurant full of people and I can’t eat sushi with gloves on.”

“Will do. See you in 20, Stargirl.”

“Do not start calling me that.”

“When it fades I’ll stop. How long is that going to be again?”

Samantha groaned as Beth cackled and then hung up. She stared down at her hands and couldn’t suppress a smile. Now all she had to do was find an outfit that worked well with starlight and moonbeams.

UNTITLED 6

CATHERINE MONROY



A PROSE WITHOUT TIME STAMP

Willie Lou

Driving past SJC,
A jet takes off to an unknown destination towards the East.
I wonder where it heads.
Is it going to be Chicago,
Like the first time I left San Francisco for Navy bootcamp?
Does it contain another young man who dreamed of moving away?

Mazda roams on 101 North,
Memories flashes back with each drop of gas.

There goes Moffett,
Once an active Navy base,
Now a ghost town.
Besides it sat the place where I took a blood oath,
Now the place where my wife sweats daily.

Passing the Hyatt on the right,
Stayed there three times,
First time an unemployed high school misfit,
Second time a sailor with pockets of dreams,
Third time a father with two kids.

VOICES

There goes SFO,
Another Singapore Airline flight lands,
Maybe it came from Singapore?
Perhaps from Hong Kong?
Either way,
I had been there,
As an angry teen,
As an embassy intern,
As a homemaker,
Next will be what?

On the left read Millbrae,
The first meal in a foreign land,
Now a regular place before departure,
The once transient stop, turned into home.

Barely misses a cyclist on Skyline Drive,
Was that me that I missed,
That young kid's jersey,
Reminds of Lincoln High,
Does he also bike to that place?
The recruiting station on the right?
To volunteer? To make his rank?
To eat his pho? To pick his job?
Did I almost kill myself?
No, I am not.

Fighting the traffic on 19th Ave,
That's the place where I bused!
That's the place where I got picked!
That's the place where I felt homeless!
Not anymore,
My bullies gone,

VOICES

My classmates priced out,
Only me,
With four houses on both coasts...
In this land where I once starved.

Chinatown!
I came here a teen,
Now mirror reflects an uncle,
The buildings looked the same,
But the businesses changed,
Visit the same comic store on Jackson,
The owner stays,
The books stay,
But the novelty wear off.

Waltzed into American Legion,
The infamous Cathay Post,
Born of Discrimination,
It started by Cathay vets,
In the year 1931,
Despised due to skin color,
Now a melting pot,
Of Yellow White and Black.

I overheard the conversations,
Some in English,
Some in Cantonese,
Did I say Cantonese?
How does it feel?
To be in a new place,
In a familiar neighborhood,
Speaking a foreign language,

VOICES

The mother language that I forgot.
Wearing a uniform,
That I have outgrown?

Today is just another day,

On 101,
In Chinatown,
At all the familiar places,
Repeating that same minutes that had gone,
I couldn't tell the future back then,
But now I can't tell the present.

Today is a special day,
A day without past or future,
An unique date,
Without time stamp.

TWO GENERATIONS IN

Wilson Hannalei

It is a moment of envy
that parts my mother's lips, standing hand in hand
With me, in the warmth of the Valerio's.

The handful of words I know are only
That, a handful:
Anak. Pancit. Ubet. Mukat. Pinakbet. Putanginamo.

I know endearments, and I know food.

I know it is my mother my grandfather calls for, and
I know my uncle has just snarled a curse, and
I know I am lovingly the last child of my parents.

I know what is for dinner, and dessert, and I know how to cook it.
Sweet coconut and chewy, soft rice. Cold ube and red beans.
Mangos and brown sugar and steamed, warm banana leaves.

Frequently, ube is an easy mouthful.
We buy an armful for nickels, rolling in a plastic bag like a poor
man's maraca
And in the late of the night we steam them:
Cradled in a beaten metal strainer,

VOICES

Handle poking from under the pot lid like a hand from the rubble
Soft and beaten and warm.

My baby cousin calls it “you-b”.
She’s not so much of a baby anymore. Hasn’t been since she grew
taller than me.
But that can never matter— I was there
I was there when she came out,
Screaming and wet and ugly.
I held her. I knew her. The warmth of her sticky little fingers.
My little baby cousin, who speaks even less of our history than
me.

She grew up with the same songs. The same foods and words and
love,
And yet she calls them by the wrong names, and flusters when
we laugh,
And I wonder what my grandfather thinks
Because beneath that warm blanket I am cold and stiff.

My mother stands in the bakery, sweating from the ovens
And she asks the cashier in Ilocano for a dozen fresh pan de sal.
I do not understand it. I can catch maybe a word, maybe two,
And the cashier smiles at us
And I wonder if it is pity
And I wonder if she knows
And I wonder if my mother aches
And I know she does.

We lie cradled in the cold, foggy arms of California’s bay.
Among our people, far from our people,
And can I even call them ours?

VOICES

(Mine?)

Mixed, and distant, with only the lingering glances
Of the taste of bibingkang malagkit on my tongue
And a great aunt's too-tight embrace—

My mother speaks a tongue I can't follow
Words I don't know, beyond my handful
Ones I am briefly, painfully comforted knowing she herself only
has two hands

And when we leave, the sweet bread warm against my arms,
She grips my one hand too tightly in hers.

UNTITLED 5

CATHERINE MONROY



THE LIGHTHOUSE

Jovan Bukarica

I

See her now
In the deep
Placid night
Where clouds rise
To the sky and vaporize
Into nothingness
She shines bright
White, A ray of life
Tinged in crimson gold
All alone she stands here
Waiting for the days to pass
Her by, one by one, like the fury
Of the feathered creatures which
Like a fleet, move together in perfect
Harmony, Yet she still stands tall on her
Little island as waves bash along the jagged
Shores and disrupt the peace I so desperately seek
I reach for the light only to fall victim to waves and night

THE PALOUSE

ALDEN HUGHES



WANTING

Meridian Ondrejka

“some of the waves of longing speak under a cover of new snow”

Silence.
Oppressive and yet
There is that shimmer.

The light,
Shining into your eyes
Off of the new snow

Like the light,
That shines into your eyes
When you look
At her.

Or him.
What's the difference?
It still hurts
All the same

Perhaps one
Is more acceptable.
But the longing?

It remain
Buried

Will it thaw someday?
Who will ever know?

VOICES

For if they do,
They are not telling you.

And so you stand
Feet freezing in the snow
Light bright in your eyes
And you just admire

You admire the beauty
That you are lucky
To witness
And you survive
On that.



*The little witch in the woods
fearful of the outside world*



*The darkness was her friend
she was happy*

But this dark was unwelcoming



But the outside got closer

she was

so scared



*and so she went
deeper into the forest
deeper into the dark
and felt safe*

*How could she be scared of the dark?
It was all
She'd Ever Known.*

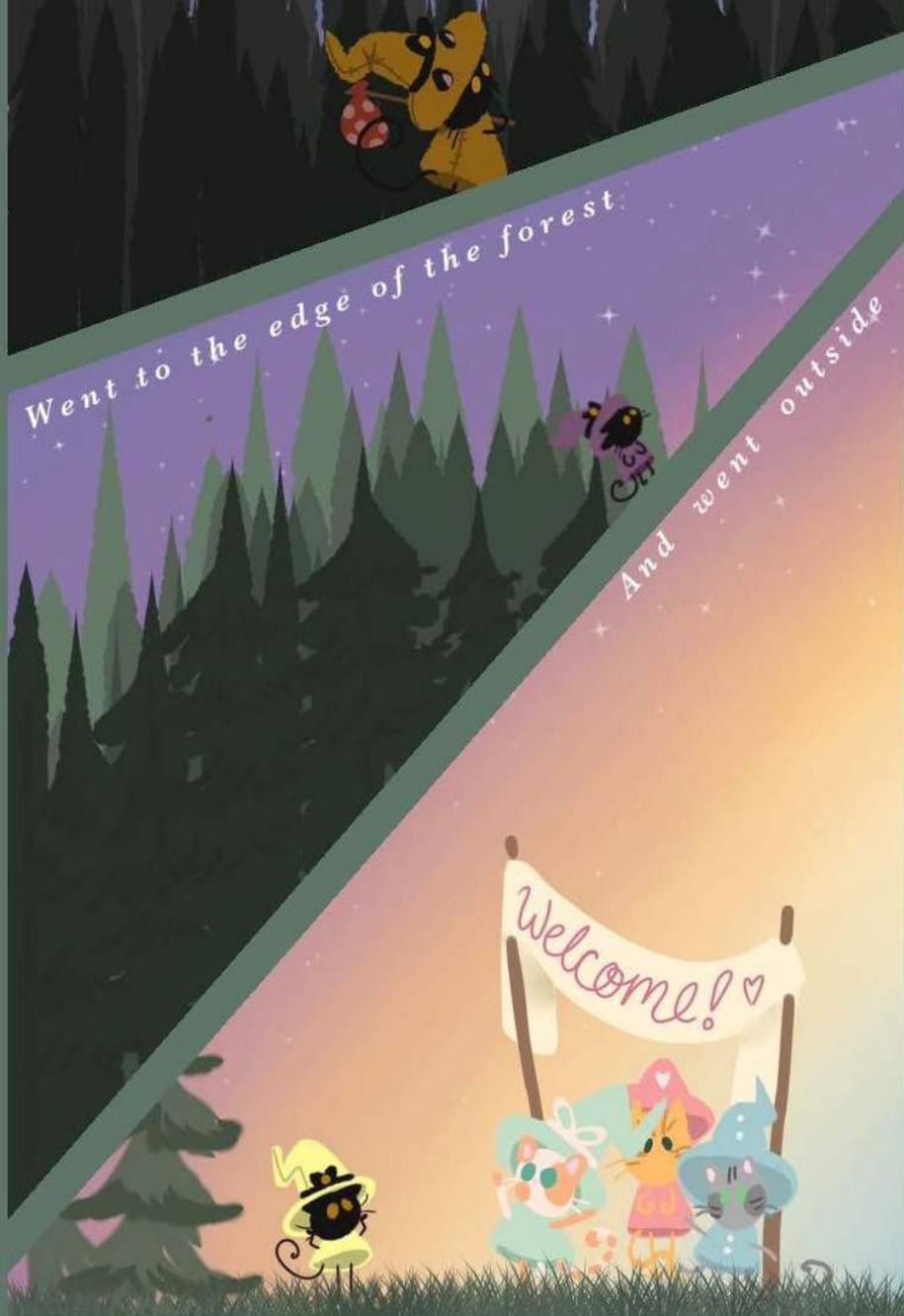


*There was no home
Not anymore*

*And so the little witch gathered up all
she had*

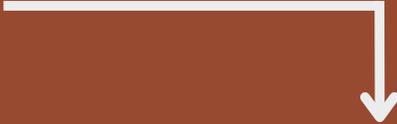
Went to the edge of the forest.

And went outside



A TRAITOR FRACTURED MY HEART

Tzitalic Gómez



The morning is cold and quiet as I drive away from Clyde Park and make my way back home. The knuckles of my hands turn white as I tightly clench the wheel of my black 1967 chevy impala. I drive down the avenue until I reach a red light. I start to feel the pain of my nails digging into the palms of my hands but I don't pay any mind to it at all. The pain in my palms is nothing compared to the pain I'm feeling in my heart. The more I think about that cursed park, the more my body starts to shake and my vision becomes clouded with tears threatening to roll down my cheeks.

"You cheater.. You liar..." I mutter under my unsteady breath. I feel blood rushing up turning my brown cheeks a rosy pink.

How long had he been cheating? And most importantly why would he cheat on me when our wedding is only a few months away? Was I not enough?

I felt rage and betrayal. I wanted to scream and beat the shit out of him. In the park, I had walked up to them ready to unleash my fury. But when the time came, I didn't do anything. No matter how much anger or how much ire I felt running through my veins, I didn't do anything. I couldn't do anything. All I could do was stare in disbelief and call his name in a quiet shaky voice.

VOICES

“Arin?”

The audacity that bastard had to try to gaslight me telling me the woman was his cousin and were simply hugging. Ha! My vision was as clear as the pristine water in the small creek we stood over on the bridge when I saw him kissing his so-called cousin. He doesn't even have a cousin called Miranda and no one in their goddamn mind would kiss their cousin! I saw them with my own eyes!

The green pickup truck behind me honks. I look up and notice the streetlight had turned green. I step on the go pedal and my impala moves forward making a soft rumbling sound. I let my right hand go from the steering wheel to wipe away a tear I tried so hard to fight back with my dark green turtleneck.

As I continue driving, I notice a couple crossing the street towards the park. The woman was smiling and saying something as the man attentively listened and looked at her as if she was the world. I assume the woman made a joke seeing as the man bursted out laughing letting out white puffs of air into the cold. I let out a chuckle and the tears swelling in my eyes finally flushed out, winning our little battle.

We used to look like that. Happy and in love. I thought I knew the man I chose to marry but instead you were cheating for God knows how long with this Miranda girl and I didn't know. Was everything you and I had a lie? Was any moment at all in our relationship real because it most definitely was real to me. You held me the way you held her at the park. You kissed me the way you kissed her. You whispered lovely words into my ears the way you did her.

VOICES

If you were doing the things we did together the way you are doing with her, then what we had must have been real too. If it was real with us, why her and not me? For chrissakes you proposed to me! Did I do or say something wrong?

I looked up at the road and quickly realized I was approaching the cars in front of me that had stopped at another red light too fast. I pressed down on the brakes as fast I could to slow down and avoid bumping into the red Yaris. The pickup behind honked again at my sudden stop and decided to switch lanes. The woman in the red Yaris in front of me poked her head out the driver's window and yelled.

“Watch where ya goin’ for chrissakes! I’ve a baby on board!”

“I’m sorry! Please forgive me. Sorry!” I said in a shaky voice as I rolled down my window to apologize. The light turned green and I rolled my window back up as I started moving again.

“Damn it, Cecilia! Get it together... The last thing you need is an accident.” I took a deep breath and wiped my tears away with my sleeve. I softly hit the steering wheel with my left hand.

I looked down at my left ring finger hoping to find comfort in my engagement ring only to find it empty. I let out a gasp and covered my mouth with my left hand in realization of what I had done.

“Shit! My ring! Damn it, I have to go back!” I switch to the turning lane and make a u-turn and make my way back to the park like a madwoman.

VOICES

During the altercation with Arin and Miranda, I had flung my engagement ring over the bridge and into the creek of Clyde Park right before storming off. The ring belonged to my grandmother and she gave it to Arin for me to inherit when he asked to marry me. Oh, how could I have been so stupid! If I wanted to break up with him I should've just said it and left. Not break up, make a statement by throwing the ring, and leave.

I reached the parking lot of the park and parked my impala next to a silver van. I grab my brown leather jacket and ear muffs as I get out of the car. The air is cold and I could feel the air piercing my airways and lungs. I locked my car and put on my jacket and white fluffy ear muffs. I turned towards the forest area of the park and find the trail leading to the bridge. I hurry down the dirt trail and stop mid-sprint in my tracks. What if they're still there? Should I wait? No. They can't still be there. I ruined their mood. They surely must've left. Even if they are still there I can't leave now. Someone might steal the ring or the creek's current might take it away. The ring itself is gold and the stone is green sapphire so hopefully it'll sink instead. It's also the only thing grandma and I have left from grandpa. I have no other choice.

I cautiously continue walking towards the bridge. But the closer I got to the bridge the faster my walk turned into a jog and then into a run. Finally, the bridge came into view and I slowed down my pace allowing my huffing and puffing lungs to catch up.

Luckily, there is no one in sight near the bridge. I make my way to the creek's bank and start looking for the ring. I feel anxious and nervous.

"I don't see it... Maybe if I go in I can look better." I step into the freezing waters of the creek.

VOICES

I feel the water go up to my mid-calf soaking up my worn down brown combat boots, black jeans, and socks.

“Please... please... be here...” I whispered as I bent over the water. With my hands, I start moving rocks left and right desperately looking anywhere and everywhere for the ring. But no matter how hard I looked for it, it was nowhere to be seen. Right when I’m about to give up, the voice of a man suddenly interrupts my concentration.

“Oi! You find it yet?” The playful voice was warm and annoyingly familiar. I look up and on the wooden bridge above me, leaning over the railing I find Pierre, my lifelong best friend. I look down, resting my dripping wet hands on my waist, as I take a deep breath trying to swallow my anger, sadness, and hurt. I look back up at him and his face full of light freckles, ready to finally face him.

“How did you find me?” He’s smiling as he always does and yet, his eyes are full of sorrow. One look into his kind dark eyes was enough for my anger to dissipate and for my tears to start flowing down my cheeks. *He knows*. He knows and sees right through me. I let out a shaky chuckle. I shouldn’t be surprised, Pierre has always been an expert at reading me.

Seeing me cry, Pierre makes his way down the bridge and into the freezing creek. He gives me a hug and I bury my face into his white scarf as I cry.

“Shh, it’s going to be okay.” He spoke in a hushed comforting tone.

VOICES

“I can’t believe... he betrayed me.” I spoke incoherently as tears kept pouring out of me.

“I know. I saw. I was coming over to visit you and Grams when I saw you running out of the house and driving off in a frenzy. I was worried and decided to stalk you.” He paused. “Sorry.”

I let out a soft laugh. “Weirdo.”

“You should’ve punched him in the face for me. You know I never liked him.” He said in a playful manner.

“If you saw everything. You should’ve done it yourself.” I pulled away and wiped the last of my tears away. “You don’t happen to have -”

“Here you go.” He pulled out a tissue from his pocket.

“Thanks. Always prepared, huh?” I blew out my nose and put the used tissue in my pocket. I let out a sigh and a puff of white air danced in the wind. “I can’t believe I’m stupid enough to lose my grandma’s ring. What am I going to tell her...”

“Oh! Cece, about that...” He holds out a finger telling me to hold on as he reaches into his right back pocket. To my pleasant surprise, he pulls out a golden ring with a green sapphire center stone. He looked at me and grinned, “Violà!”

I smile as I let out a sigh of relief. “My grandmother’s ring! You found it!” I grabbed the ring and held it close. I place the ring in my pant pocket when suddenly, realization hits. “You *found* it.” I glowered at him.

VOICES

“Umm... yeah. Cece, you already said that.” He spoke in a confused manner. I pulled off my earmuffs and whacked him in the shoulder with them as hard as I could. Wide-eyed and startled, he took a few steps back and held his hands out in a defensive manner. “What did you do that for?!”

“Seriously?! You let me search for that ring like a maniac when you had it this whole time!?” I lunge forward and whack him a few more times.

“Oi! Oi! I’m sorry! Sorry! I’ll buy you wonton soup! Your favori-Ow!” I immediately stop hitting him.

“It’s a pleasure doing business.” I put my earmuffs back on and step out of the creek. “Let’s get out of here, I need to stress eat.”

Pierre gleefully followed behind, rubbing his shoulder, “At least you’re feeling more like yourself again Cece.”

SHATTERED

Ian Ross

I have made myself a statue
Tons of steady, tough rock devoted to you
It would have sheltered you from a thousand storms without
chipping
Then you shatter it with a word
Its very essence blown away
Then you leave.
And I'm left with the pieces of myself you've thrown away
To start building something new
But I don't want new.

SYLVIA

KAREN USATINE



GARDENS

Wilson Hannalei

Relearning your name
With every passing fancy,
The gate beckons wide.

Devoted affection:
For this place.
For myself.
I plant it alongside the home,
Watching with pride
How it climbs these walls.
It is my promise
To this place,
To myself.

Affection and grief:
A balm for my aching
My gaping rawness
Something tender
For what remains
yawning and dark
Clasped so carefully
Between my trembling
(But so, so gentle)
Fingertips.

Unchanging friendship:
I think of you often.
I touch the things I made for you
Of you

VOICES

And I remember things
I easily forget.
And I think about calling
And I never do.
Despite it all, it flourishes
Vibrant and green
Flowering outside the window.

Beware, dark thoughts:
This bleeding warning
Hisses at you, open mouthed,
Teeth bared,
Dark leaves spilling
Like arms outstretched
Between the world
and the front door
Fortified in this rage
This bleeding warning
These claws of mine,
Always unsheathed.

Truth:
Bittersweet,
as all satisfying things are
I cradle it close
And think of my mother,
Who's favorite color is purple.
I think of the biting sharpness
Of long nails and tight heels
Of my jaw,
clenched so tight it hurts.

VOICES

Patience in adversity:

One, two, three, four,
All these deep breathes
I've learned to help you
Help me,
Close your eyes
And think of somewhere better.
Open them slowly
And take in the flowers.

Resolution:

And anxiety, trembling,
These two sides
Of the coin between my fingers.
I've always been a fan of warmer colors,
This distinction is nothing
But ironic.

Distrust:

I grew up
With four bushels of it
Large and looming
In my childhood garden.
I rarely spent time there
And that is only worse—
For all those wary hours
That I stayed quietly in the back
I could always smell it's flowers.

Courage, strength:

I hope it grows thick
Enough to trip me
Enough to make my eyes water

VOICES

I season my food generously
In hopes the dried leaves
Carry something over
Leave something in me
And they don't. And it doesn't.
I water it generously,
As tightly woven a prayer
I can manage.

Thoughts of absent friends:
My mother is an older woman
And I often found myself bitter.
Bitterness, anger,
It comes easy and
I welcomed it easier
Unfurling and gurgling
Tepid waters in my stomach
Boiling blood and cold sweat,
It is grief I am feeling
It is decades too early
Of me mourning.

A message:
For myself.
That is what this is.
A bouquet over a conversation
I lay out the dirt
In twisting, spiraling patterns
In lobes of meanings
That I let few walk through.
These simple purple petals,
Drip with weight.

VOICES

Think of me fondly,
When these roots extend beyond
When my bones are gone.

SAFETY SCISSORS

Eric Scoles

Clapping, cheering, laughing, lagging
Excitedly ecstatic and yet you're lividly lacking
Playing on the playground purposely perpetuating
Snipping with your safety scissors is a waste of time

Snip the strands of your soul away
Cut the corners, take the shortcut
Tear your tears in half so they're not seen
Fold away the feelings, fold away the fears

Safety Scissors still don't save you from the suffering
Safety scissors still don't save you from yourself
Safety scissors hurt you
Safety scissors aren't so safe

Gross gross motor skills running you away
Fine fine motor skills saving you today
Run run run away cause people think you're gross
Save save you today cause it is never fine

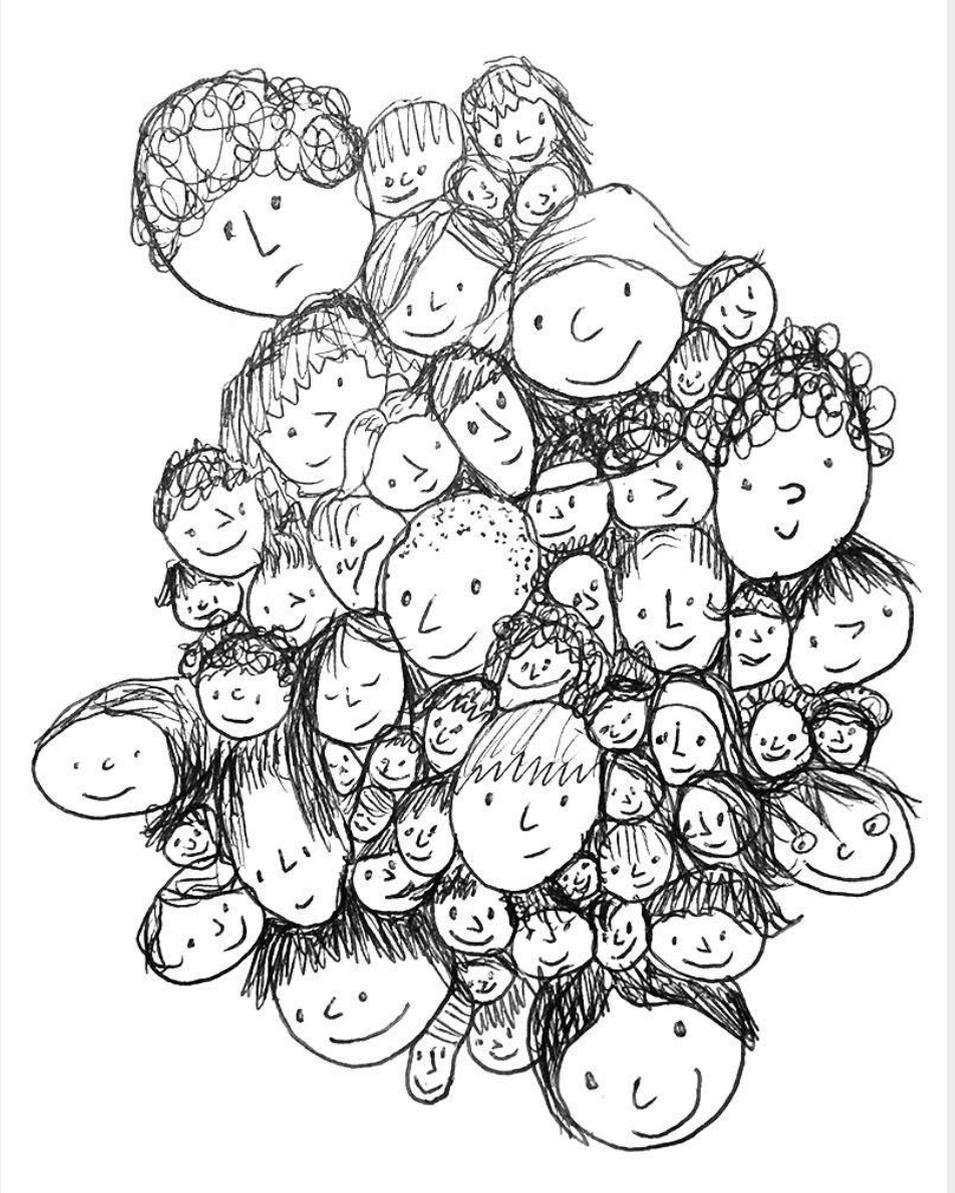
Crease the secrets so no one ever knows
Rip away your rights so that you're never wrong
Bend yourself but beware that you'll break
Because who knows how much more you can take

VOICES

Safety Scissors still don't save you from the suffering
Safety scissors still don't save you from yourself
Safety scissors hurt you
Safety scissors aren't so safe

It's ok to struggle
It's ok to cry
It's ok to know that I'll be by your side

So put down the safety scissors
And cry to the stars
And bandage up your safety scissor scars



THE GIRL ON THE WALL

Sylveo Paris



My father is a collector. When the first unicorn was found, he spent half of the family's savings on a swatch of its hair. I remember being in the library when my mother found out, an outraged scream scraping through the house when she opened the safe to see only a few pounds left. Father left a week later.

Mother spent the weeks when Father was gone alone in her room, only leaving her bed to have tea on the porch. I avoided her as much as I could, scared my ever growing collection of books would worry her even more.

Mother never entered the library, said the dust hurt her eyes. I enjoyed the smell, the feeling I got standing in the middle of the room edging toward claustrophobic, surrounded by towering shelves filled with books. I would lay in the sun pouring through the large bay window for hours, reading. Anything would do, no matter how trite. The words filled my head the way nothing else could.

Father had not told us where he was going, but he returned 2 months later in a much too expensive suit, driving a much too expensive car filled with much too expensive gifts. He never said where he got the money, only that he had been traveling to expand his "collection of wonder," he called it. He led my mother and me into the front room, and had the servants begin bringing in box upon box of fantasy. A pouch of leprechaun coins that could never be lost, eye paint made from crushed mermaid scales, an ogre skull as large as my torso.

VOICES

For my mother, a solid pearl hairbrush that made your hair glitter when brushed, and a bottle of pixie dust. For me, a dagger made from a dragon's talon housed in a leather sheath made from the same dragon's hide. It was a solid white blade, and even with my adversity to violence, I had to admire the weapon for its beauty. My mother never worried again, and the next day, one of the bookshelves was empty.

Father called me outside that morning. He stood by a large van as the servants filled it with the books. He turned to me and said to choose which of these I wanted to keep. I replied all.

The essay on historical politics and the collection of fairy tales found themselves on the left side of my desk.

Every month Father would go out for a week and bring back a new shipment of wonder, and another bookshelf would empty. The walls became crowded with wonder, art depicting unicorns grazing surrounded by the teeth of goblins. I started a pile of books under my bed, trying to create my own library. I got a bruise on my head from the bed frame for my troubles.

The first time a shipment was coming in when Father was still home he threw a party. Other collectors came from all around to view our collection while wining and dining on familiar foods. The shipment was smaller, a servant had told me, a single item, but big enough my Father wanted everyone to see it. We all gathered in the library.

The bookshelves were all gone. Tacked up on the wall directly across from the door was a large sheet. Mother stood beside him in a pixie silk dress, glitter on her nose, smiling. I was in the crowd. The room was too big, and I couldn't hear a thing my Father said to the guests.

VOICES

With a final flourish of his arm, he pulled the sheet away.

Pinned to the wall was a girl, about my age. She was bare, her hands glued in place as if she was covering herself. Her hair, a deep brown, flowed freely across her shoulders. Nails kept her on the wall, one on each hip and through each shoulder. The wings they were more delicate with.

She had large ones, but thin like a butterfly. Small pins kept them unfurled, exposing the swirls of blue and green that seemed to move with you. She was beautiful, and she was dead.

For the sake of my head, I continued to read in the library, carrying my books with me from my room. I couldn't sink into the flow of the words anymore. Her eyes were closed, glued shut I assumed, but I could feel them on me. An itch on the back of my neck, a shiver on my lower back. She wouldn't leave me alone, always pulling me away from the serenity of the words. I went back to my room, but she could look through the walls. My books gathered dust.

The silence of the house soon became too much for me. Father was spending more and more time out with other collectors, and Mother spent most of her days staring at the wall. She took my books away from me, and I needed them back.

I used the edge of my dragon blade to pull the nails from the wall. Her blood seeped out of the holes, sticking to my hands and discoloring the blade. I ripped the pins out with my hands, flakes of her wings sticking to the blood. With a final heave, the last nail came out, and she crumpled to the floor. The house was silent the entire time.

VOICES

Her wounds healed in seconds, sealing and leaving only small circles of fresh pink skin. I sat beside her, my hands shining blue and green, and waited.

I do not know how long it was before she sat up across from me. The sun was warm on my face, the light blocking her from my sight. A cloud passed overhead, and I saw her. She was closer than before, our knees touching, her wings surrounding the both of us. I held my breath, afraid the slightest exhale would cause her to crumble. She did not speak, only extended her hand to me.

In it was a deep red book, unlabelled. I took it, and it was warm in my hands. Sound bubbled in my chest, rising up my throat.

“Thank you.”

My lips formed the words, I felt the rumble in my chest caused by speech, but I couldn't hear anything. She simply smiled at me and closed her eyes. My eyelids fell with hers. When I opened them, the sun had set, and she was gone. I opened the book: it was blank.

Father never returned from his next trip. A man came to tell us the news soon after he left. He walked into the fairy forest one night and never came back out.

They found him nailed to a tree, naked.

I suspect Mother never understood that Father was truly gone. She would prowl around the house opening drawers, asking everyone if they had seen her husband. As the glitter faded from her nose, so did the light in her eyes. She died a month later; suffocated in one of the bags Father had given her full of pixie dust.

VOICES

My love for the written word never fully came back. I began to miss the way her eyes had captivated me through skin and walls. The bookshelves in the library were full again, and yet I felt empty. I needed the silence she brought.

My Father was a collector, gathering everything around him because he didn't know what he wanted. I know what I want, and I know how to reach her.

BOBA TEA

HANL SCHUMAKER JO



A FAIRY'S FOREST

Jenna Martello

Oh, how sweet
a forest of fairies!
where the water runs clear
and grows the sweet winter berries.
where the tall redwood stands
in a wide-open clearing.
a dad, a father, so grand;
so modest, yet alluring.

the music of fast-flying wings
fills the air like a symphony.
fairy friendships take flight,
and nature moves in synchrony.

...or so it seems,
at least to the human eye.
quite the opposite, in fact.
the previous words all lie.

the darkness that they fear,
the darkness which overcomes.
the light that they seek,
the light of which there is none.

VOICES

much like our own world,
full of thieves and traitors.
the fairies and their egos
become narcissists and haters.

so beware this little world,
this forest of fairies.
where the water turns muddy
and grows the sour rotten berries.



AUTUMN'S QUEEN

Meridian Ondrejka

“the leaves of harmony embrace in the streets”

Falling, flitting,
You swirl through the square

I reach for you,
But miss.
And I too
Swirl away.

You look so stunning
In your blood red dress

As we spin
And dance,
Among these
Fallen leaves.

With a laugh,
You twirl
Leg out,
Disrupting the pile

Leaves fly
Through the air

VOICES

Like fresh rain
Or snow

The leaves
They catch
Within your auburn hair
Creating an autumn crown
Fit only for a queen

You finally stop
We continue to laugh
As you gently
Take my hand

You drag me back
Into your court
To spin away once again.

UNTITLED 10

GRACE MCGRAIN



CONSTANT

Nineteenth

It's clear to me that something is missing, a constant feeling of incompleteness, a puzzle piece that I lost somewhere along the way to being who I am today.

Constant

It feels as if a pebble is stuck between my eyes and my skull adding pressure on top of what is already a vice grip tightening with my brain in between the jaws.

Constant

A memory that should be yet is always out of reach and one that you can forget from time to time but always hits the hardest when you go to reach for something but grab only air.

Constant

It follows me everywhere like a puppy who wants to play but you have no time so it yips and whines at your ankles, making sure you never forget.

Constant

I see it in my past, the actions I took, the reasons behind those actions and the feelings that led me to believe the paths I took were justified.

Constant

VOICES

I feel it in my present, hear it in the ring of its absence, eyes that see its void, long for its feeling in my chest to my fingertips, taste it in the food and drink when I have time to think, and smell its sharpness in the air.

Constant

The plans I make for the future are made to seek it out in a world where it may not exist but it must be there for if it is not in the future then I am already too late.

Constant

In my most beautiful delusions I have it in abundance as those visions exist purely to give me back that missing part of me, the piece that I long for so so deeply, yet I have to end them without fail each and every time, for living in delusions will kill the strongest of will, mind, and body.

Constant

I would despair but thankfully I am cursed without the ability to stop, so forward I march into that middle distance where I might find it.

Constant

I know not if I will ever find it, if it will find me, if I myself must make it, a combination of the three, or a fifth separate option that has yet to make itself known to me much like the quarry I seek endlessly.

Constant

VOICES

Perhaps one day

Constant

IN THE RING

Collin Bartolomei

The saying: "dead man walking" echoes here.
Muhammad Ali versus Frazier well...
Twas savage, brutal boxing 'tween those men.
Important? Nay! Tis plainly senseless, Yes!

Fists fly connecting high, ears ringing, Why?
Brain buzzing, dizzy dodging, far fatigued.
His strikes are far and hard, while mine you see
Are low, not slow, to punish thee to cede.

We bloody beaten beasts bare boundless bane
That future days reveal our lethal err.
Steps never taken, speeches never heard.
We lost so much and gained so few, for what?

Barbaric deeds must die to better all.
No person need to fight nor die for sport.



MANTIS

HANNAH NEVITT

FRIENDS

Nineteenth

Frieeendss moooree
eeehheehheeh
look at them

down

there

I'll go great them and see if they want to be friiiieendss like the others

I fuckin hate this quest.

Yeah we all do now shut up and look for any traps. We don't know what's in here.

Guys shhhh they could hear us.

So fuckin what princess we gonna kill 'em or die trying.

baff

What did I say about shutting up and traps, plus she's here to keep you alive best not get her angry.

Yeah hmp.

ohmyfuckin godihatebothofyou.

Say that louder trap boy.

I didn't say shit.

Sure.

Guys what was that?

Prolly nothin' princess.

Even if it was nothing better to assume it was something.

I don't like this.

VOICES

No one does. Trap boy, we almost there?
Fuckin hope so.

ooooo these ones look different mmmmmmm like theessseeee
oneeesss gonna try the smmmmall one

Do you wanna play dolls with me?
HOLY FUCKING SHIT WHAT THE FUUCK!!
What's the matter?
Didn't you see the fuckin girl with the dolls?!?!?!
Nope.
Now I really don't like this.
No one does princess.
Let's get ready for a fight.
In this fuckin darkness
Yes. That's why I bought the potions.
Ohhh thanks a bunch.
Yeah what she said.

theeseeee oneeesss realllllly will be fuunnnnnnn time for plan B
then ehehehehe

WHY DO THEY KEEP FUCKIN COMING WHAT THE FUCK?!?!?!?!?
SHUT UP AND FOCUS ON THE KILLING PART!
WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU THINK IM DOING?!?!?!?!
CAN YOU PLEASE STOP SHOUTING it makes it harder to
concentrate on the spells.
AGH Yeah I'll try.
Fine.

...
Was *huff* that *huff* the *huff* fucking *huff* last *huff* of
huff them.
I hope so.

VOICES

Come on, we still need to find out what was directing them. Something that can keep that many dead thralls under its control is a threat.

Then why the fuck DONT WE GO BACK!?!?!

uhh guys?

WE CAN'T IDIOT!

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?!?!?!!

Guys?

THE CORD WAS CUT DURING THE BATTLE SO THAT MEANS WE GOTTA GO KILL WHATEVER IS CAUSING THE DARKNESS!!

GUYS!

*together*WHAT?!

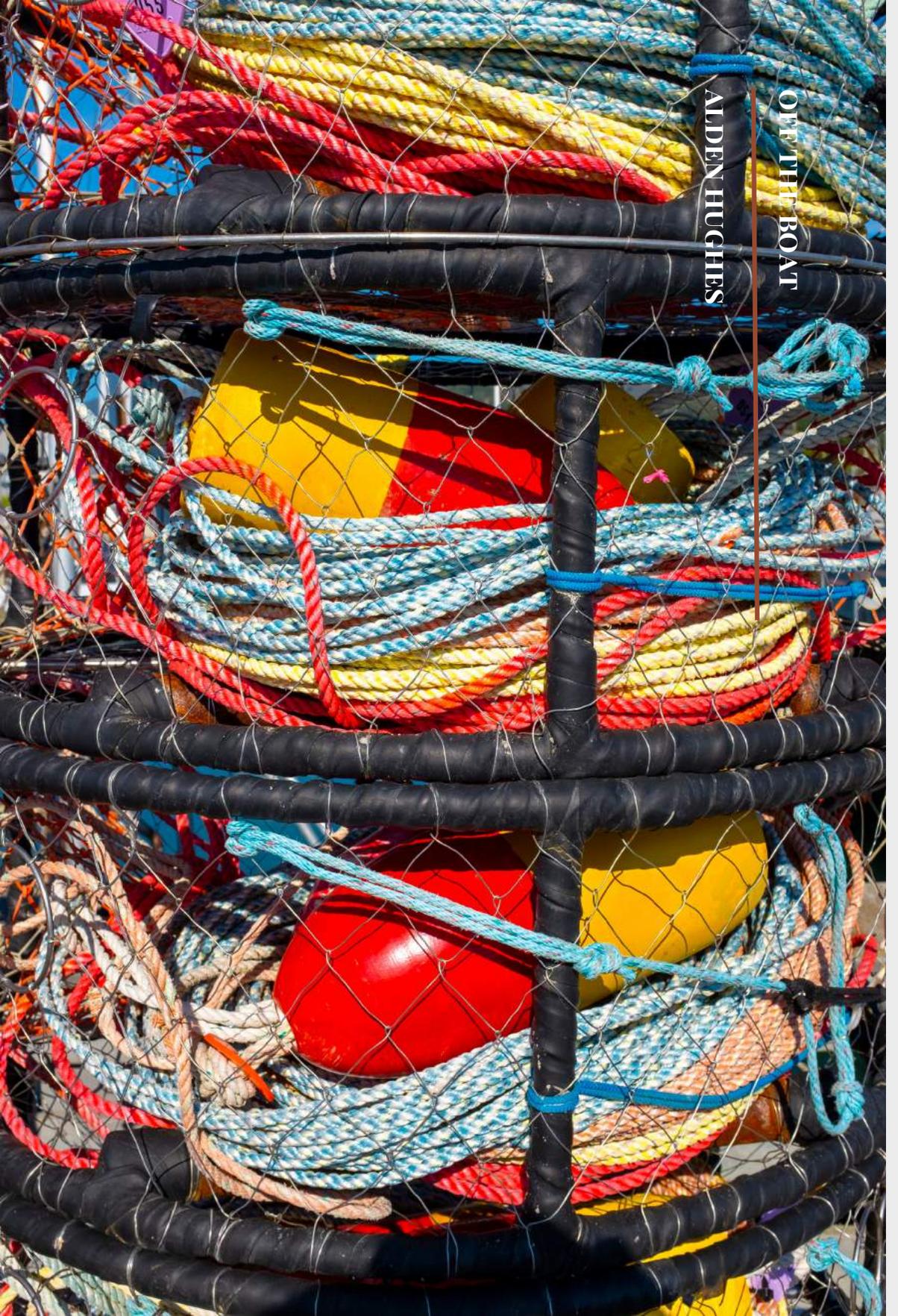
points umm

oh noooo nnnnneed for thhhhhat friiieeenndsss

ehehehehehehehehehe i just want friiieeennddddsss

ON THE BOAT

ALDEN HUGHES





DIMENSIONS

Julianna Kelly

I've lived a life in the 2nd dimension
Still and lifeless
Been too careful, too quiet
In my head I start to riot
But on the outside I'm silent
A permanent smile
Not a hair out of place
Pretty as a picture
Stiff as cardboard
My heart begins to fissure
Couldn't tell from my face

You can't take flesh and bone
And steamroll it down to perfection
Regardless of your intention
Take a life so vivid
And shred it down, shred it dull
I am more than livid
But anger is something you're never you'll never see,
Because anger was never allowed to me.

For myself
For my health
I am taking my personality off the shelf
And stepping into my 3rd dimension
Alive and breathing
Fluid in motion and emotion
So beautiful, electric and powerful

VOICES

Full of life, of love
Radiant and divine
My life is mine
I feel like me
Exactly where I'm supposed to be.

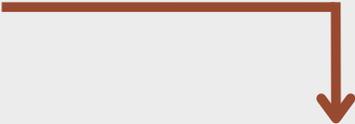
PREENING

ALDEN HUGHES



THE LIFE OF A NARRATOR

Aubrey Goings



Okay, okay. I know I am late. Very late. But, honestly, it's not my fault. And you should believe me because I have great integrity. See, on the way here, a tree fell onto the freeway and the authorities took extremely gratuitous precautions. I mean, who would close the whole freeway for a tree that blocked one lane?

Anyways, I am being told that I need to get to the point, and I really should because I have a job to do — a very important one in fact. And the longer I wait, the harder it will become. That is the life of a narrator.

Okay, here we go:

Amongst a vibrant valley of greenery was a village filled with ample glistening lakes, ponds, and rivers. It was truly a breathtaking sight. Birds flew harmoniously through the sky, which was adorned with scattered clouds. Trees swayed in the breeze, creating flickers of funneled light that painted masterpieces on the valley floor. People chattered in town with their neighbors and friends. The mill in the town was partly assembled, an auspicious sign of the prosperity to come. In the town, a dainty girl dressed in a day-to-day cotton dress called to her dog named Anna, “Ralph, come here dog,” she called out.

(Wait, wait, wait. I was told that the dog's name was Anna, and now it's Ralph? Why can't anything go right today? Well, that must be the only issue because I have never made any mistakes before.

VOICES

(His hubris was really catching up to him).

Hey! You are NOT allowed to intervene in the story. I am the one narrating.

(But you have no clue what is going on.)

That is not true! I am perfectly capable. I'm ignoring your accusations, goodbye! . . . All right, let's get back to the story and pretend that this little mishap never happened.)

Ralph then bounded towards the girl and entered the small wooden house when she opened the door. If the dog was a person, he would seem like a sycophant, but it is clear to see that the dog followed the girl's commands completely out of companionship and love.

As the girl closed the door tightly shut behind her, some other people in the village began to do so also, gathering their families and herding them inside. It was time for their mid-day meals. Despite the dispersing of the cheery tones of the valley floor, they would continue inside as the people conversed and told the stories of the day.

Suddenly, the large bell tower rang, acknowledging the mealtime. The bell rang once, twice, three, four (*It's not four in the afternoon! It should be about one o'clock. Why is it still ringing?*), five, six, seven times. As the chimes ended their call, a portly and venerable man ventured onto the platform in front of the tower, signifying his clout in the village. The shadows began to deepen on the platform and the valley surrounding it, the clouds were thicker and darker than moments before.

VOICES

“People of my village!” The venerable man announced, for there was a festival in their future, “I fear that we have much to worry about. (*Umm . . . ?*) For those of you still out, head to your homes immediately! For the Mystic Marauders of Seven are arriving, and soon anguish will fall upon our village. We will do our best to protect, but the power of the Seven is mighty. Here, on top of the bell tower, we have the Spear of Glory,” He gestured to the top where a pitch-black spear with silver etchings stood. “It will protect us through this battle.

“Head home, and stay safe.” At that, he left the stage, presumably to find his own shelter, hoping that the protection of the spear was not specious.

The sky grew darker and even more ominous as the village’s protectors stood there and waited, and waited. Waiting for the battle that would soon envelop them all.

(I don’t understand, this story was supposed to be about the little girl and her dog. They were supposed to go on many adventures throughout the story.

(You are so clueless. You would have known this if you were at the debriefing meeting. We talked about how that story was postponed. Apparently, the audience wants stories that are fantasy and thrillers).

Well, it’s not my fault that I couldn’t make it, and someone should have told me. And — wait! I told you to leave. This is my job and my story. You need to get back to your own, anyways.

(Actually, I don’t. I am on lunch break. Would you like an apple slice? (It definitely did not fall on the floor.))

VOICES

No, no, no. Leave me alone! I have a job to do and I don't want your dirty apple slice. Go annoy someone else! You are lucky that I have scruples or your whole salad would be flying out your window!

I am going back to the story, and I don't want to hear another peep out of you.)

On the ridge of the valley near the village, a small group of seven appeared with the incoming storm following closely behind. It seemed that the storm was following them into the village, and that was exactly so. These Marauders were called “Mystic” for a reason — each one of them has studied and mastered the magick arcane arts.

As they traversed down the well-worn path to the village, little was done to stop them. Any long range defensive attack from the village was impossible, and advancing towards them would be fruitless against the powers of the group. Fighting against the leader alone — who is often referred to as “One” or the “Harbinger of Misery” — is difficult enough. In fact, before the Mystic Marauders of Seven even formed, and before the Harbinger of Misery earned that title and became skilled in his powers, his defeat was practically inevitable. Many have tried to indict him for his crimes, destruction, and theft of significant objects of history and power, but they have been thwarted.

Beyond doubt, the Spear of Glory is the reason behind the appearance and attack of Mystic Marauders of Seven. If only the people of the village knew that the relic would be their demise instead of their salvation.

VOICES

Now, in the village, the first signs of the invasion arose. The villager's weapons did little to fight against the magick. Whenever one tried to fend off the Marauders, a strike of lighting controlled by the Harbinger of Misery struck down the defender. And the Marauders continued to advance. But, despite all that, the villagers, filled with determination — ((Hello.))

Why are you back! I told you not to, and I was actually doing rather well telling this story.

(It turns out that we are scrapping this story and will actually do the one about the girl and the dog, so you don't have to narrate this one anymore.)

Are you kidding me!

VIEW

VANDANA PAWAR

