

AAS LIT MAG



VOICE & CHOICE

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100 YEARS
LGBT
VOICE OF CHOICE
REMEDY
THE WATCHING ONE

FALSE PORTRAYALS
A VOICE
UNTITLED
MAYBE ONE DAY
THE SHIP THAT SAILS FOREVER

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100 YEARS

POEM

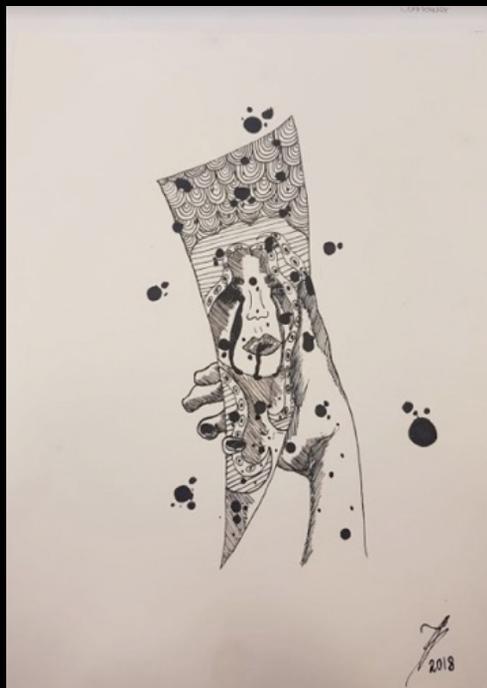
ADA SZYSZKO

Born in newly independent Poland,
With what I thought was a bright
future ahead of me.
The colorful bricks and the russet
tiles of the Warsaw tenements
spanning miles in front of me,
The Sigismund's Column on central
square, standing in all its glory.
The crowds, the white and red flags,
The colors, *so vivid...*

The shock, the horror, the surprise,
as I read the morning paper.
'Poland under occupation', 'Third
Reich attacks Poland',
Slogans, slogans, painful news before
my eyes.
A silent prayer at the dinner table,
God, give them the strength; Holy
Mother of God, grant them your
protection.
The rosary in my hand, *so vivid...*

The sparks of hope for an unoccupied
Poland, flickering in our young,
Polish hearts,
As we stashed our basements with
ammunition,
The hours, days, weeks, months,
The never-ending preparation,
And the indescribable anticipation of
the one, final sabotage.
The certainty, *so vivid...*

Five o'clock, the howl of the siren,
filling the Warsaw streets,
'W' Hour has come, the hour to fight,
to get back what is rightfully ours.
I grab my ammunition, helmet, gun,
Wrap the white-red string around my
helmet and step out onto the street.
Mother, father, oh glorious nation, I
will fight and bleed for your liberty.
The streets, *so vivid...*

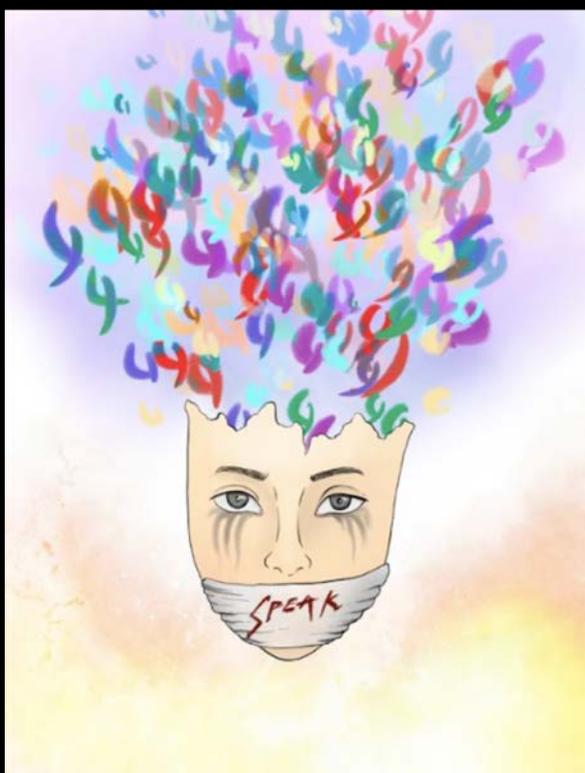


All the racket, chaos, a world turned
upside down.
Planes buzzing above, filling us with
the anticipation - a hope,

For the aid that never comes.
The terror as your friend collapses
into your arms,
'Make it worth it... will you?' the final
request of a fighting soul.
The scarlet stains, *so vivid...*

Vorwärts! Vorwärts!, distant
screams,
The urge to fight pushing me forward
- one, two, three bullets whizzing by.
A sudden push, a sting, a stab, within
my chest.
I stop, I gape, I collapse down onto
the Warsaw street.
The now distant tramp of combat
boots echoing behind me,
The pain, *so vivid...*

Until the end.



“Always be yourself” - a lie everyone tells you, your entire life. “Be yourself, everyone else is taken” - another lie. “Be yourself, no matter what they say”, “own who you are”, “never forget to be yourself”. All these things, quotes, that people tell you, at the end of the day don't mean what you want them to. In the end, people still don't accept the fact that girls kiss girls, and boys kiss boys.

Things that belong in the closet are towels, spare sheets, and clothes. Things that don't belong in dark corners of a closet are people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, and trans. Despite the fact that people tell you to be yourself, they force you to stay in the dark, lonely, dirty closet, and hide your true identity. And as long as this illusion of “the closet” exists, and lingers, so will many individuals. Amazing people, lovely human beings, may never truly live their life the way they were supposed to, or wanted to because of their unaccepting, prejudice, community. How sad is it that in the year of 2018, people still aren't comfortable to be completely themselves? Doesn't the world-

have bigger problems than boys who kiss boys and girls who kiss girls? People don't like things that aren't normal. Therefore, when others choose to stand out of the crowd with the free voice they were given, they are shut up, and pushed back down just because it's not the way it was before, and it's not what everyone is used to. Our society is scared of change. This is a fact I have recently learned about us, our world. We don't like change because we can't predict what will happen exactly, because we can't create statistics for unpredictable beauty. We don't like that, which means we can't let it happen. Or - that is what we are taught, told, directed. Is it the right thing? We wouldn't know, because if a change is made, our world falls apart. Another thing we have been tricked into believing. True?

Everyone in the 21st century, I believe has a free choice and voice to be who they are and who they wanna be. Love is love, and you don't choose who you love. Love chooses you. Therefore, coming out should be handled simply for what it is; an inevitable and normal process, treated with careful love and care from loved ones. It's just like the music you like. You have a free voice, and a free choice to surely not your choice either to be attracted to the same gender.

You should never apologize for who you fall in love with.

VOICE OF CHOICE

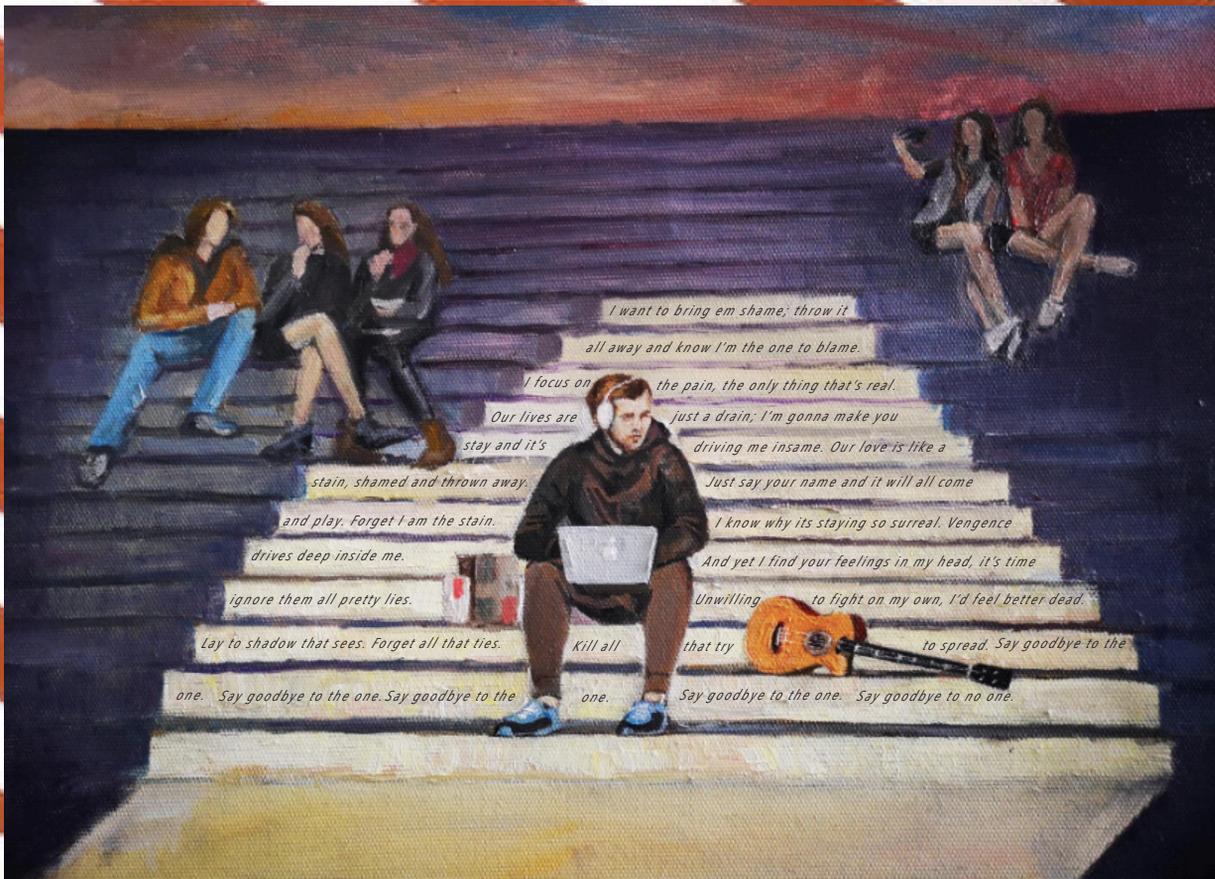
POEM

ANONYMOUS

Fiery sun rays, flaming desert heat,
Parched lips and nowhere to sleep
Distant memories, a false sense of hope,
hundreds of people and an undersized
boat.

A trouble crossing, a sleepless week,
A restless mind and a dream turned
bleak.
A sudden cry, a colossal wave.
Broken hearts and less than half
saved.

A searing pain, a broken
understanding.
A deserted beach and a fatal crash
landing.
Growling stomachs, a swarm of
crying.
Crushed hopes and an impulse to
stop trying.



THE WATCHING ONE

SHORT STORY

TITUS BROCK

A rough wind blew up the steep slopes of the mountain, pushing aside scraggly bushes, bending away small trees. All was silent in the grey morning except for the wind. High up the steep slopes, where the fog dwelled before it was driven off by the wind, there was a shelf of stone. The wind blew over it gnawing slowly away at the weathering rock and was parted by a by a great shape that is harder than stone. Stone colored scales were woven tightly together over a lean muscled body, giving way to a long tail that snaked over the stone ground. Massive shoulders formed a wall in the front of the creature, its forelegs standing proud its hind legs in a crouch. Great leathery wings were folded on each side, each tipped with cruel spike standing at attention. A great head loomed, gazing down the mountain, its deep, ancient gaze fixed on the village below. It was a dragon, one of the last of its kind, and its name was Iamor, The Quiet One.

Far, far below the village, the rooster crowed and the sun was climbing in the valley, slowly dispelling the morning haze. Iamor watched unmoving quiet and still as ever. He watched a life he could never be a part of, for no one would trust a dragon. Ancient beings they were indeed, but they were few and far between, settling alone. More dragons than one in a place was a problem, for they would soon be discovered, and it would be, at best, a few short decades before they were both slain by and noble adventurous knight or, more often, a cunning wizard. Iamor lived alone and always had as far as his long memory could reveal. Dragons were not cared for by there parents, it was not necessary- there were few natural things that could threaten even to a newborn dragon. In addition the youngest wyrmling already possessed excellent hunting instincts and a cunning, razor-sharp mind. Dragons learned wisdom and compassion as they aged- and thus by and far they were a noble race, for the evil and villainous among them were mostly killed after exhibiting rash behavior and even if they reached adulthood most often repented. Ironically their reputation was the opposite, for the only dragons that were known to humans, outside of forgotten tales, were doers of great evil and heralds of destruction. As the dragon pondered this, a light rain started. Water beaded on the dragon's scales, dripping down off his long snout and razor-sharp teeth. Still he was motionless.

Every day the dragon watched. The dragon watched as the children went out to play in the streets, and the farmers went out to tend the field in the misty early morning. The dragon watched as, in the midday hot midday sun, the workers and the children clamored sweating inside their dwellings as the smell of food drifted all the way up to the dragons perch. The dragon watched as, on a warm sleepy afternoon, children led herded their families flocks, herding them all over the valleys and up the mountain. The dragon watched as, through the windows of the great house, the shadows of children and adults alike were captured by the smoothly flowing words of the storyteller, flickering in the firelight, while snow swirled outside in the early evening and ice spread on the rooftops. The dragon watched as, late in the night, the wizard writing, blood gleaming on the parchment in the starlight, forming arcane runes and symbols of things better left alone, while the wind howled all throughout the valley, and the wizard's wooden tower swayed precariously. Iamor watched for that was all he could do. Each day another piece of straw was laid on his heart, and each day his burden became greater.

The dragon watched. He watched but he did not see. Only his keen sense of hearing alerted him of the approaching intruders. He heard footsteps and laughter, a beautiful sound he had not heard before. Iamor crept backwards into his lair. A pair of small children appeared, driving their herd of goats up over the ledge. This time Iamor could not watch. In a moment of supreme courage, he stepped out into the open! At the sight of Iamor, the children stopped awestruck. Their goats scattered, bounding down the mountain into the valley in fear, like grains of rice cast into a pot. The dragon did not move or speak—for he too was struck motionless. The children moved first. Casting down their shepherd rods they ran, fleeing after their flock down the mountain. Iamor hesitated, and then, for the first time in thousands of years, Iamor the Quiet One spoke, “*Wait!!*” he commanded, but he was far too late.

Downcast he slunk back into his cave. What had he been thinking? Now he would have to move or hide. It was only a matter of time before a war party would come out from the village. Iamor was not afraid of the villagers, however, he would not to kill them. In addition, he was apprehensive about meeting a wizard, and feared his glory hungry heart. There was but one thing to do. He retreated farther into his cave and opened his jaw and— exhaled. A great bolt of lightning burst from his maw accompanied by an earth-shattering peal of thunder. The villagers heard the echoes below and mistook it for a distant rockslide. The bolt of lightning impacted upon the top of the entrance to the cave and it fell, sealing the dragon inside. The dragon got to work. Soon the entrance was thoroughly blocked. The only sunlight that reached the inside of the cave was through small holes left for ventilation near the top.

The next day the dragon listened, as metal-shod feet marched outside the cave. In hushed low overtone, voices discussed what was to be done about the dragon. The footsteps and voices slowly receded. The next day they returned, and the next day, and the next. Every day a party was sent out to search the mountain. Dropped scales and footprints had convinced them that this was not a child’s fable and the villagers would not rest easily with a dragon at large. Every day while the villager searched the dragon cowered in his cave. The echoes of the laughter he heard echoed in his head. Iamor crouched with his head to the the wall listening, terrified of making a sound. However, he did not hear laughter, instead he heard grim quiet voices. He knew it would take a long time for the villagers to be convinced that the dragon

was no longer there. Iamor was afraid to leave his lair. Days passed. Then months passed too. The forays into the mountains stopped yet Iamor still hid. Then hunger overcame caution and Iamor cleared the entrance to his cave. Using his broad shoulders he pushed through the broken rock, and into the cool outside air. He hunted and ate and hid. He was lonesome. Iamor knew that he must leave but was unwilling. His burning hope resisted the cruel frozen fist of logic. Perhaps the children who had seen him would return and this time would not be frightened away. Perhaps the village would decide not to kill him. Maybe he would be understood. Still more time passed. In the depths of his heart and the hidden recesses of his mind, Iamor hoped to be discovered. He still watched the village but no more people came to trouble him. Iamor watched but now he was not still. He was restless. All the time he heard the faint echoes of laughter in his mind. Yet he was not discovered and the children never returned. Soon his isolation became too much for him, a nagging tug constantly in the back of his mind, working ceaselessly, waiting for the moment where he let his guard down. One day he did.

Before Iamor could stop himself, not daring to wait and plan, he unfurled his wings and leapt into the sky. He sailed directly over the village. There was no chance of him going back now, he had certainly been seen. Spiraling downwards he looked for a suitable location to land. From his high vantage point, he saw villagers fleeing while others rushed for their spears and clubs. He heard screams and terror, not laughter. Iamor alit in a clearing just outside of the town. The bravest of the town, men and women, formed a loose semicircle around him, a nervous fence bristling with crude spears and heavy spiked clubs. Most were dressed in tough, dirty clothing and none wore armor, a few bore shields hacked from boards after the last bandit raid, and some no weapon at all. They were no warriors, yet they were accustomed to living in these harsh lands. Iamor instinctively unsheathed his claws. The wall tensed. So did Iamor. Both sides were motionless. No side was willing to move for fear of death. Suddenly from the rear there was an order. Iamor recognized the voice. It was one of the voices that had spoken grimly in the search for the dragon. Iamor had noted however that his voice, while grim was not full of hate. The semicircle separated into two arcs and three figures, the town elders, stepped onto the floor of the trial— three judges. The Captain, The Wizard, and The Storyteller.

The first stepped forward. He, unlike the others, was clad in boiled leather armor reinforced with strips of metal. Shoulder cauldrons stood out on his wiry frame and under his armor he wore stiff grey clothing. His appearance was orderly and even, to the tips of his neatly trimmed grey beard. Yes, he was old, but the fire of youth had not departed from his muscles even though his steel blue eyes held the frost of long experience. He had a ruthless wolfish face, and he bore a sword, unadorned in a simple leather scabbard, the names of his two masters emblazoned on the sheath— Honor and Justice. He was the captain and to him belonged the grim voice. Next was the wizard. His black robes and crimson tunic were new and unworn, in contrast to the stretched hollows of his eyes, and his thin sickly black hair, well combed and arrayed over his shoulders. Thin, cruelly strong fingers gripped an ornamental black staff, and vicious-looking symbols were embroidered on his clothes. His skin was stretched over misshapen muscles and veins popped out of his neck, bound with a gold chain and locked with dark stone. His eyes here empty and hungry. They hungered for glory and praise. This was a man who desired power and, even more, the fame that came with it. The storyteller came last and was the eldest of them all. He was clad in a simple tunic and had a rough cloak over his shoulders to keep out the wind. To the dragon he seemed the most richly dressed of them all for his long hair was like burnished silver and gleamed brighter than the captain's sword and the wizard's gold, his eyes were unfathomable jewels like the sea, deep and holding mysteries. He had a kindly laugh-wrinkled face and moved slowly and deliberately. He slowly stepped forward.

“Begone dragon,” the captain stated firmly, “we want no death in this land.”

“*Neither do I,*” responded Iamor and his voice reverberated off of the mountains and back echoing through the spectator's minds.

“Deceive us not with idle tricks!” The wizard shouted magnificently, pompously slamming his staff into the ground and spreading wide his arms.

“*I speak the truth,*” was the reply.

The storyteller gazed at the dragon a long time before inquiring softly, “What do you mean to do here, Dragon?”

Iamor stared at the storyteller. What did he mean to do? How could he exist alongside beings that were so different from him? How could he answer that question? That he was lonely? That would certainly not do.

“*I plan to— to reside nearby*” he answered hesitatingly..

“Ah, you plan to reside nearby and then rule or devour us all!” cried the wizard, “I see your plot you evil wyrm! We will not be you slaves!” There was uncomfortable muttering “Empty words,” said the wizard cruelly, “you can never trust a dragon.”

“Can you give us any proof that you mean us no harm?” inquired the captain crossing his arms.

“Only this,” interjected the storyteller, “he has lived here for months, if not much longer and has never done so much a steal a sheep.”

“Ha,” mocked the wizard, “do you know so little of dragons, or has their great patience never entered your stories of which you love so much? I say we slay the dragon and rid the land of a great evil.” He addressed the crowd, “Fear not, for I will not let this foul beast rind you limb from limb, I will save you.”

“If you mean us no harm, wait here while we discuss what to do with you,” ordered the captain and the trio retreated a distance. The warriors surrounding Iamor looked even more nervous without their commander and some seemed to be on the verge of fleeing. The town elder’s decision was reached rapidly and they returned. The captain grim and the wizard flushing red with fierce anger. The storyteller stepped forward. Iamor thought he glimpsed sympathy in the storytellers eyes but the his voice was firm as he announced his judgment.

“It has been decided that there is no evidence that you have been found guilty of any crime. However, it has been decided that for our mutual benefit and as a token of your goodwill you will depart never to return.”

The words fell like hammer blows upon Iamor’s heart. He didn’t move. The captain slowly drew his sword. There was a scraping of metal and a shuffling of feet. Iamor slowly unfurled his wings and turned to fly away. No sooner than had he left the ground than the wizard scream harsh, guttural words and extended his hand. An invisible sword pierced Iamor’s heart and he fell, dead as stone like the color of his scales. Iamor’s blood watered the ground. No sooner had the wizard lifted his arms and laughed, exalting in his victory, than the the captain’s sword pierced his heart also.



FALSE PORTRAYALS

POEM

ANONYMOUS



From childhood dumb deeds are done
From childhood all I ever thought of was
to have fun
My family was perfection
Mom, Dad, Sisters, Brothers all I got was
affection
Someone in the family not like the rest
All I know, she is still blessed
During college diagnosed with a mental
condition
Family fell with tears and commotion
At the time not aware, triggering my
emotions
My immature brain at the time
What I did to her now feels like a crime
I would annoy and make fun
I didn't understand, what have I done?
As adolescence comes, I learn more about
schizophrenia
A doctor educating it through forms of
hypermedia
Go learn about schizophrenia on
Wikipedia
Really, this is how they are portrayed in
the media?
They are violent and scary
These false portrayals, illness is arbitrary
She is ordinary
People think the exact contrary
Think, write, sing, conversate, laugh

She can all do
I bet what she can do, you can never
outdo
People with mental illness have a voice
Illness is not received by choice
Books, internet, movies are never very
accurate
I love her
Educate before you assume



“Get your hands off of me you fools,” Silfur commanded, “I’ve done nothin’ wrong! Unhand me!”

“You know what you did,” the burlier guard snarled, half dragging, half pulling Silfur down the corridor.

“Where am I being led? What is going on here? You have no right to do this!” Silfur continued.

“We have every right,” responded the other, bearded, lean guard, “You were seen denouncing the faith. The high council will have none of that!”

Silfur’s yells bounced down the corridor and back silencing him as he was hauled further towards the stairs. The torchlight illuminated the bruises and scars on his face that had been awarded to him after the troop of guards had beat him senseless. Along the corridor, between the torches, were doors after doors, all with large iron locks adorning them. At the end, just outlined in the flickering darkness, were a set of stairs leading downward.

The guards of the faith dragged Silfur down the steps, his legs knocking on each one with a painful thump. Silfur stayed silent, now looking closely at the walls, ceiling, steps, and floor, twisting in all directions to gain any sense of direction or location.

“What do you think you’re doin’?” the larger guard asked Silfur,

“Tryin to think up an escape plan?” the thin guard mocked, “Good luck. No one’s escaped from the capital fortress, ever. And you’re going to high security.”

Both guards started to laugh, dragging Silfur down to the bottom of the steps, where there was a strange underground cliff with what looked like a pulley system. The cliff looked out over a pitch black cave made of rock. Silfur could not see the bottom as they threw him onto a feeble wooden platform that creaked as he curled into a ball. Via a pulley system, the platform, with Silfur on it, was pulled out over the cavern until the cliff was no longer visible. In fact, nothing was visible except the cords of the pulleys and a single tower carved of rock with a peak the size of a large table. It hung-

there for what seemed like an age, then it dropped. Silfur fell to the rock with a pitiful thump, sprawling onto the cool stone, then curling up again.

All this, just for one speech Silfur thought to himself, almost seeing the crowd below him in the darkness. Silfur looked out at the silence, and, partially just to have some sound, began to recite the words that he had practised for weeks upon weeks. He saw, below the rock, the faces of the people staring up at him, silent. Over and over he gave his speech, pacing in the little space he had so that the whole crowd could see him. Echoing off the rock, echoing back and forth, echoing into Silfur’s brain. Silfur continued to repeat, time after time, day after day, speech after speech.

He heard it coming back to him, the speech, echoing back through the chasm. Not just his own voice this time, but another. Silfur looked up at the solitary cords, suspended above his stage to see the flimsy wooden platform, loaded with the days meal, ricketing its way towards him.

“Is that all you say?” the voice echoed from the far-off cliff, “the same speech every day?”

Silfur went silent for the first time in months, the echoes mulling over him in waves.

More echoes, more silence.

“You know that you’re making it difficult to guard you right? All the guards need to be switched out so you don’t persuade them into jumping.”

More echoes, more silence.

“You should eat more, instead of throwing it all off the edge.”

The cart had almost reached Silfur, stopping to swing over the silence, hanging over nothing. Then it opened, and just as it had dropped Silfur, it dropped a bowl of porridge and a jug of water. They fell through the air, then cut through the stillness by crashing onto the rock, spilling onto the stains from all the years before today.

“I guess not...” the voice echoed, rebounding itself into non-existence.

Silfur did not return to his speech giving, he did not eat the food. He did not touch the shards of jug now scattered around the spire with the rest of them. Silfur stood, staring into the darkness. He had spoken out, against the theocracy, against the oppression, against his own life. They had echoed back to him with the very things he had spoken about. They echoed...

Silfur ripped off his clothes, stipped them into ropes, used a shard of the jug to fashion a makeshift hook. He then carefully placed his one saved water bottle in his now sash of a shirt and waited. Silent.

What Silfur estimated to be four hundred and twenty speeches later, the next platform arrived. Silfur stood, and, with an upward swing of his arm, threw the hooked rope up to the stage. It flew into the night, sailing until it clanked softly against the rock. Silfur quickly pulled it back up and with the same upward swinging throw, hooked it onto the planks.

He pulled just as it started to move, the planks creaked, groaned, and snapped. Silfur held the rope taut as the hook clung to the planks now splintered into pieces, connected to the pulley system by a thread. Silfur took a running jump and flew out over the darkness then, holding the rope as tight as possible, hung. Silence over the void.

Silfur began to climb, the thick strands of muscle in his arms straining and burning from ages of disuse. Slowly making his way up the rope of clothes, he was aching, wrenching, distorting his muscles until he was near enough to the top. Almost to the cliff, Silfur began to swing. He swung back and forth, over the darkness, the rope holding him as he whistled through the air. Gaining more and more momentum, he heard a shout.

“Hey, wait, what?” A guard shouted, looking out at the wooden bits returning from the void.

Silence, swinging, nothing.

Silfur waited, hanging at the end of the arc furthest from the cliff, then he fell. He swung up, over, and onto the cliff, dropping right in front of the lean guard that had brought him there. The guard stared, immobile before shouting and raising his spear.

“He’s escaped! Help! the prisoner escaped!”

Silfur did not speak, he just moved. He dashed towards the guard who was raising the tip of his spear towards him shakily. He casually knocked aside the spearhead, rushed inside the man's range, and smashed the jug concealed in his sash onto the man's head. The guard collapsed, and knowing he had only seconds, Silfur grabbed the spear.

Another guard rushed through the doorway and was immediately bashed on the forehead by the end of the spear, which Silfur then used to push the man, staggering, over the edge.

With a fading scream echoing in his ears, Silfur quickly stole the first guard's uniform, scrambled around on the rock putting on the ill-fitting pants, pushing him over the edge as well, and slipping out the door leaving only a slight smear of blood behind on the cliff rocks. Up the same rough stone stairs that Silfur remembered so well, and into the same corridor. Luckily, Silfur met no one and dashed down the corridor to the entrance at the end of the hall. He opened the rough, heavy, wooden doors to reveal a fine maroon carpet decorating yet another staircase, this one marble.

Silfur ran up the steps to find himself amid an average, well-festooned, palace corridor. *Left? Or right?* Silfur thought to himself, before mentally flipping a coin. Right, Silfur turned, walking purposefully down the hallway, his booted footsteps muffled by the carpet. Near the end of the corridor, another guard walked around the corner right at Silfur.

Hurriedly, Silfur put his head down and looked away from the guard as they marched past each other. Silfur's heart beat. His hands slipped on the spear slightly. The guard said nothing and moved down the stairs Silfur had just come from. Silfur had to move, they would discover the two missing guards soon enough.

He began to jog around the corner only to run right into another intersection, and then another. Passageway after passage Silfur dashed through, hiding from guards and avoiding any sound of people. Finally, Silfur approached another door, this one made of a fine wood with a marble doorframe trimmed with gold. Silfur attempted to wrench the door open, throwing himself against the door. He looked around before kicking the door wide and hiding inside, breathing heavily.

A moment of silence past.

Silfur turned to see the room he was in. Rows of shelves, display cases, wardrobes and weapons racks lined the walls in a decorative fashion. The walls of this room were marble, with great gilded windows on the right-hand wall. There were more carpets, with intricate golden designs embroidered into them. Curious, despite the weight of the situation, Silfur stepped over to the nearest case, looking inside to see a pair of strange, elongated, leather gloves with no fingertips.

Silfur was in the middle of reading the list when a voice from the door shouted,

"I've found him! He's in the treasury!"

Silfur glanced around, at the guard who was rushing towards him, then raised his spear and, planting it on the ground, used it to jump off the ground, boost off the display case, and kick the man in the throat, spinning back to the ground. The guard gasped and choked, clutching at his throat and waving wildly at Silfur. Silfur slammed the man's head into the case, shattering it, then took the gloves inside, slipping them on to find they fit perfectly.

With his spear back in hand, he ran further into the room full of treasures. *Very poorly guarded* he thought to himself *It's like they want me to come and take this stuff.* A few more broken cases later Silfur was now wearing a normal looking brown monk cape, a pair of strange green sandals, the tatters of his original sash of a shirt, and a top hat. He now burst back through the door he had come, charging around the corner and toward the left side of the corridor.

"Now this is more like it!" Silfur yelled as a group of heavily armoured knights of the faith clanked towards him.

Silfur ran towards them, jumped at least twelve feet, his strange boots glowing, and pushed off the ceiling, landing in a full sprint behind the bucket-headed knights. He shot down, the hoard behind him, and around corners, up stairs, down stairs, through a random dining hall, and out into another corridor.

His lungs folding in on themselves and his body heaving, he took a quick break near a hallway window. Through the gold panelling and coloured panes, Silfur could see the streets below were full of people. Silfur looked down at the people in confusion. *Was it a holiday? Some celebration he had missed?* Silfur cracked the window open and listened down at the masses.

“For too long we have been put down! Made to wear rags! Made to die young, uneducated and enslaved! But no more! Today we can speak out!” A man near the entrance to the palace was standing, screaming to the crowd that Silfur now saw was all the way down the main road, and filling the side streets as well. This was no holiday, this was a revolt.

“And we will!” The crowd bellowed, hollering with the newfound power of an infant that has learned to scream.

Silfur looked down.

What would he do? He could escape, run away, into the crowd. Take the small fortune he was now wearing. No. He couldn't. He had to help.

Silfur stood, and then immediately dropped to the floor as an arrow shot through his top hat, embedding it in the wall.

“My hat!” Silfur yelled in outrage. *Oh, they were going to get in now.*

Silfur jumped from wall to wall to ceiling, pushing off with his spear, then he dropped down, whipping the spear down onto the shooter. The man collapsed the floor. A twirl, a jab, a duck, a punch, a leg sweep, a weave. Three more men lay dead around Silfur. One more man advanced, a sword out, a fighter's stance. Silfur dropped the spear and backed away, slowly moving one wrist around the other in a strange swirling, stirring motion.

The gloves began to glow, orange light flooding through runes floating in the air around them. The man's eyes were wide as he swung his sword at Silfur. Silfur grabbed the blade with his left hand, sharp edge on glove, the blade stopped. Silfur locked eyes with the man, then, punched the hand holding the sword, making the man release it. He dropped the sword and immediately punched the man in the chest, grabbed his arm and elbowed him the side of the head. The young man fell to the floor unconscious.

“Always the innocent are the first victims,” Silfur quoted in a mutter under his breath, “so it has been for ages past, so it is now.”

He ran through the palace. First, the servants quarters. After dispatching a few guards mercilessly on his way, Silfur burst through the kitchen doors making the cooks scream.

“You all need to leave!” Silfur shouted, “there's been a revolt! Evacuate now!”

“But what about our things? Our clothes and stuff?” A young server boy asked from near Silfur's knee.

“I'm sorry but you don't have time. You'll all be killed if you stay. Go!” Silfur motioned for them to run, then was off again.

He tried to remember the directions, *Was the front entryway to his right or his left? Well, fifty chance either way.* He dashed down and around, working his way east, towards the mob and the commotion. Eventually, it was almost dawn, Silfur found his way to the entrance hall. He peeked around a servants door and into the large chamber. The main palace doors were barricaded and there were guards lining the hall.

Pillars were supporting a cavern high roof, providing the perfect cover.

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Silfur was now made painfully aware of his lack of spear as he slunk out the door, silent to no attract attention. He clinked his gloves together, readying himself to fight, but then the orange glow shone out from the runes again.

“Damn it,” Silfur cursed under his breath, trying to hide the runes in his robe that, now that Silfur looked closely at it, seemed to be melting into the darkness.

“Ehhem?” A voice asked,

Silfur spun to see a guard captain looking at Silfur in his tattered prison and guard outfit with glowing gloves and a robe that was almost hiding him from existence.

“Sorry sir,” Silfur said, before winding his arm back and punching the man so hard he flew across the chamber and hit a marble pillar, sliding to the floor with a slump.

“What was that!” A guard yelled, “Who’s there?”

Silfur took a deep breath before clinking the gloves once more and sprinting out from his pillar. All the guards turned and converged. Attempting to take a swing at him. Silfur dodged and ducked, threading the needle under ever sword until he reached the great palace doors, still at a full sprint. With all his might his raised his fist and threw his whole weight into a slam. His body flying full force, fists first, into the doors which responded by crashing open with a deafening slam.

More echoes, more silence.

No one moved, Silfur stood, everyone stared, Silfur looked about, taking in the scene. A man stood on the palace steps Silfur had once stood on, making the same speech Silfur had repeated, a thousand times. A herd of guards was blocking the door behind him, about to flood outward and beat Silfur.

“Stop!” a voice yelled from inside the hall, causing a ring of shock to flow like a wave through the crowd.

The guards parted for their recently-punched-across-a-room captain who staggered up between them all, facing Silfur. The captain grinned, ripping open his shirt to reveal an equally glowing orange breastplate. Silfur groaned.

“Tonight, everyone in this palace will most likely die,” Silfur announced to the man.

The crowd cheered.

“No!” Silfur yelled in response, “They fight, with violence, with suppression, with silence, echoes, and lies. But we cannot! We have to be better!”

“Oh what nonsense,” The captain laughed, advancing on Silfur.

“Do you really want to be the man responsible for such death, bloodshed, and murder?”

“Speak for yourself.” The captain responded, “from the reports I’ve received, you’ve killed a number yourself tonight.”

“I know,” Silfur whispered, then said louder “I know, it’s too late for me. I’ve killed, I’ve torn myself apart. But it is not too late for you. It is not too late for these people. It is not too late for all of us.”

The captain whipped what Silfur thought to be a tear from his face. He flicked it at Silfur. It landed on his cheek. It was blood.

The captain charged with a Viking axe in hand. His eyes bulging with veins in his neck pulsing in rage. His glowing armour illuminated the night as he clanked his way forward, bearing down on silfur. A wild, crazy smile adorned his face as he swung. Silfur dodged. He swung. Silfur dodged. He swung, Silfur, ducked under the blow, and shot a punch up into the captain's face, shattering his nose.

Now covered in blood, the captain roared and swung again. Silfur dodged. Silfur rolled past the captain, jumped to his feet, slammed his fist into the captain's shoulder, spinning double kicked him in the hip and side, reached down and pulled the captain's own dagger from his boot. He then slammed his heel into the captain's knee's driving him to the ground. He slammed again, now using the edge of his flat palms into the captain's pressure points, making his arms drop to his sides. He circled the captain, now head down, mouth open in a circle of pain.

"Look what you have done!" Silfur shouted, "You have robbed your own people, your own kind of their speech, their rights, their voice. And now they scream louder. This is on you."

Silfur punched the captain in the stomach making him double over.

"What would you do?" Silfur yelled to the crowd.

The crowd yelled back with an incomprehensible wall of hate. Silfur looked out at them. He remembered the faces of the people on the rock. The speech he repeated. The speech that ended with "What would you do?" Silfur stopped, he stood, he did nothing.

More echoes, more silence.

Silfur dropped the knife he was holding, poised, the point on the man's neck, ready to stab through the throat. A drop of blood slid down the knife. Silfur watched it slide down the smooth steel. The knife clattered to the ground.

Silfur dropped to his knees next to the captain. He was crying now.

Silfur wrapped his arms around the captain and cried into his shoulder.

More echoes, more silence.

Silfur stood for one, last, final speech.

"You all came, searching vengeance, punishment, payment, and justice. I can tell you. Like this, you will find no justice. Justice is doing what is right. This," Silfur motioned to the captain kneeling, "This is not right. This is not justice. Killing will not help. We must find peace, be free discuss, and work together. Before we were silenced, but now, we can be free. Do you really want, your first act as a free people, to be mindless murder? Or would you rather it be the reforming of a nation and the improvement for all."

UNTITLED

POEM

ANONYMOUS

In a faraway courtroom
In a tiny seat
Sits a tiny small man
With a face as pale as wheat

He has done nothing wrong
Yet has been punished well
For doing nothing wrong
Just fishing in the well

He wants to talk but can't
And instead has to listen
To the jury in court
To the man named Chrisen

Chrisen is a jury
Quite corrupt in fact
And instead of serving justice
He serves his own tax



So the man has no choice
But to sit there and grumble
To complain about court
And fumble in anger

His voice hasn't been heard
And justice has been "served"
So he has no choice
But to embrace the courts voice

The poor man will serve
Twenty years in jail
For doing nothing wrong
For fishing in a well

MAYBE ONE DAY

SHORT STORY

ANONYMOUS

Iris isn't sure what time it is. The sun is setting, the peachy colour of the horizon shining dimly through the window's blinds and dancing lightly in patterns on Kira's mussed up bedsheets. The tinkle of the little shells dangling from a dreamcatcher that hangs outside the window is faintly heard. However, all Iris can think about is the thought that's been plaguing her head since the two girls were let out of school.

Her head is a mix of her mom's freshly baked cinnamon cookies, the scent of Kira's flowery perfume and the oncoming worry of an irrelevant essay due on Monday. They all swirl around the major issue, a discovery that Iris has made that flashes red warning signs in her head, wrapped in yellow police tape to signal that the idea is still being investigated, to put it metaphorically.

These are minor details, she thinks. She tries to push what she believes is a problematic thought away, and tunes in to what her best friend, Kira, is saying.

"It's just so hard, you know?" She groans, clenching her pale fingers around the fine-line pen she is holding and scrunching her face into a frustrated expression.

"What do you mean?" Iris asks, pretending she'd been listening to her best friend's rambling all along.

"I can't understand how they expect me to finish this drawing and at the same time hand in an essay for a subject I literally couldn't care less about! What do they take me for, some kind of mindless robot?"

"That's life, Kira," Iris mumbles, realising her friend is once again simply frustrated about the ways of education. She slumps back and lies on the pillow behind her, resting her head on her palms. She's heard this rant before, *many* times.

"Well, life is a pain in the arse."

"You could say that again." The two resume their peaceful silence. Kira returns to her sketch, murmuring curse words under her breath. Iris goes back to doing whatever she'd-

been doing before, bound to get distracted anyway.

A minute passes, and Iris finds herself gazing at Kira.

The girl's raven hair has been pulled up into two chaotic buns, but they don't seem to be doing their intended job very well. Strands have been plucked from them by Kira's dainty fingers in her dramatic complaining about the world's education system, and they hang in front of her almond shaped eyes. Faded copper pigment remains on the pale skin of Kira's monolids, a reminder of the day's makeup. Her skin is clear of blemishes, the lucky girl, and instead she has little freckles dot her rosy cheeks like constellations of stars. Kira's Asian ancestry has caused her to have rather thin lips,

but her bottom lip is plump, making it seem like she has a natural pout. Her chocolatey brown eyes are sharply staring at the paper of the sketchbook she holds in her hand as she outlines the dim pencil lines she'd made an hour before. Iris is so stuck in her dreamlike daze that she doesn't notice the charming brown orbs she'd been staring at snap up to meet her own. "Take a picture, it'll last longer," Kira chuckles, her eyes returning to the paper, as if nothing had happened. Iris's heartbeat speeds up a little bit, ashamed that she'd been caught. She stares at her hands, which fiddle with the bedsheets, eager to find something to distract herself with.

Kira groans again, throwing the pen into the corner of the room in anger.

"I can't concentrate right now! School is getting on my nerves."

Iris laughs. "C'mon, it's only Friday! You've got the whole weekend to finish this off."

"Yeah, but I want to be able to *do* stuff this weekend! I was so intent on finishing this today." She lets herself fall onto her back, lying spread-eagled on the bed and moaning in frustration.

Trying to hide a smile, Iris grabs her friend's thin wrist and attempts to drag her off the bed. She stands up.

"Come on, you can finish this later. You're not going to finish anything in the state you're in. It's called an artist's block, Kira, look it up."

Kira gets on her feet, mumbling about the work she still has to do. Silencing her with a finger to her lips, Iris leads her out of the bedroom and down the stairs, not letting go on her best friend's hand. The two have known each other so long that Iris could probably make her way around Kira's house with blindfold over her eyes.

Kira's mom stands in the kitchen, chopping up what smells like onions.

"Hiya girls, what are you up to?"

"Kira has lost her motivation," Iris states promptly, putting her hands on her hips playfully and giving her friend a look. "I'm going to help her find it."

Kira rolls her eyes, but smiles anyway. The two put on their shoes by the doorway – Iris a pair of classic Converse High's, and Kira some clunky brown boots that she swears are in fashion.

They leave the house and Iris leads the other girl through the little woods next to it. Kira is questioning her best friend non-stop about where they're going, but Iris gives her a cheeky grin in response, having a surprise already planned out. Eventually, Kira gives up, and the two walk through the blur of oranges, reds, and browns of the forest in a comfortable silence.

They arrive at Iris's destination, and the said girl turns to give Kira a raised eyebrow.

It takes the black-haired girl a second, but soon enough the memory clicks into place. Realisation dawns onto her face, and her eyes light up.

"I totally forgot about this place," she says in quiet awe, wondering how on earth her best friend remembered something from a time so long ago, a memory that had been stuffed into a box along with a bunch of childhood toys for Kira.

It's a beach. There's nothing special about it, it doesn't even lead to an ocean (it's really just a big lake), the pine trees have shed a few needles that now lay on the white sand like dirt, and the water is dark green, not a clear blue like you'd see in the movies. The sand is pale and cold – it is autumn, after all – and fish swim in the water, making it absolutely off-limits to the two girls, being two of the most squeamish people in the small town. Yet, it's an important place to the two of them. This is where they spent a few summers together, playing in the sand and daring each other to dip their toes under the cool surface of the lake water. It's where they told each other secrets, even those so personal to them that they wouldn't dare gossip about it at school.

Kira laughs joyfully, kicking the sand with her boot in cheer and doing a little dance. She's thankful to her dear friend, for always holding out her hand for her to latch onto when she was having trouble getting up. Turning to her, she gives her such a wide smile that her gums appear, a smile she only shows when she really wanted to express her happiness.

Thank you! Oh my gosh, I really needed to get out of the house and see this place,” she says, giggling and flinging her arms around her smiling best friend.

“It’s no problem, Kira. You never realise when you need to take a break, after all,” Iris says, blushing lightly and returning Kira’s hug.

The two break apart and smile at each other, grateful to be back at the small beach after so long. They sit on the cool sand, crossing their legs and watching the remainder of the sun’s rays dance around in the sky. The clouds have turned a pale cotton-candy pink, and the delicate light blue of the day has turned into a gradual gradient into the night sky’s deep blue.

Iris, suddenly realising the quiet atmosphere between her and Kira, stares at the ground, the forgotten stress of before returning.

What would Kira think of her if she told her? Would she be disgusted? Repulsed? Probably. Would she yell at her? Would she leave her behind, unable to accept what was Iris’s reality? It was hard enough to deal with these thoughts every time she saw Kira, Iris wouldn’t know what to do if she left her.

Though perhaps it would be for the best. Iris couldn’t blame her best friend if she did.

Besides, wouldn’t Iris feel the same if she was in Kira’s position?

And what about her parents? They loved Iris, but perhaps they wouldn’t if they found out what went on in her mind. It was wrong, so wrong, and Iris just had to accept that.

“We’re officially coming here every day,” Kira says with a grin, snapping Iris out of her mental contemplation. “I’ve decided that this is now our meeting spot. You can’t change my mind.”

Iris smiles softly and nods. Kira, noticing her lack of enthusiasm, turns towards her with a concerned frown, the little dimples in her smile vanishing.

“Hey, are you okay? You’ve been sort of... distant today.”

The beauty of Kira’s face is dim in contrast to the disappearing hues of clouds being blown past in the wind behind her. The strands of hair that had escaped her bun and that hung in front of her face have been tucked behind her ear. A frown embraces her fragile features. It’s a shame – she looks so much prettier with a smile.

“Yeah, I’m fine,” Iris says, grinning as wide as she can – that doesn’t make her look like a lunatic, does it? Kira raises an eyebrow. “Iris. I’ve known you since you were four years old. I *know* when something’s wrong. Don’t try to fool me.”

Trying to ignore the way her heart skips a beat when Kira says her name, Iris smiles again in a way she hopes looks reassuring.

“Clearly, you don’t know me well enough, Kira. I’m *fine*, don’t worry!”

Kira sighs. “Fine, if you’d rather lie to me than trust me, be that way.” She looks away again, now staring at the pretty sky with a disappointed expression.

Is it really about trust? Iris trusts Kira with her life, no doubt about it. Have either of them ever betrayed each other? Then again, have either of them never told the other something? Iris knows she’s being a coward, but she doesn’t mind being scared of telling the black-haired girl this special something if it preserves their friendship. She could hide this secret until the feeling passes – she probably should.

“I’m sorry, Kira. I do trust you, but... it’s better for the both of us if I don’t tell you this,” Iris says, knowing that Kira is well aware she’s hiding something. It’s useless pretending she isn’t, Kira is right, after all – Kira knows when something’s wrong.

“If you trusted me, you’d tell me what’s bothering you,” Kira mumbles stubbornly.

Iris groans. "Come on, Kira. Don't be like this - if I don't want to tell you something I don't have to."

"Aren't we best friends?"

"Exactly! Best friends should understand when not to be nosy."

"So, I'm being nosy?"

"No, that's - I didn't mean it like that."

"I'm sure you didn't. Best friends should tell each other everything, Iris! Especially when something's wrong!"

"I know! I get that, and when have I ever not told you something before now?"

Kira stays quiet. The two girls stare angrily at each other, their eyebrows furrowed in frustration.

Why were they fighting? What had happened to the hugs and smiles they'd given just a couple of minutes ago? "Let it go, Kira," Iris says, turning away to stare at the sand.

"No. You're going to tell me what's wrong. Don't make such a big deal out of this, I just want to cheer you up!"

"*I'm* making this a big deal?!" Iris laughs humourlessly. "If you'd just stop asking me, we can let this pass and pretend nothing happened."

"Well, now we can't pretend nothing happened!"

"And who's fault is that?"

Kira groans, standing up from the ground. "Fine, be that way." She brushes the sand off of herself and begins to walk away.

"Really? Please don't do that Kira, don't be angry at me. I'm sorry, okay?"

Iris isn't sorry. How can she be sorry for feelings that can't be helped? God, Kira must hate her now. What was wrong with her? Why couldn't she be like Kira, perfect and wonderful and the ideal girl? Kira ignores her apologies and keeps walking, making her way to the opening between the trees. It's beginning to get dark, and Iris knows that Kira doesn't know the way back.

"Kira! Kira, come back," Iris pleads, standing up as well and attempting to run after her - a task that proves to be difficult in the sand.

"I'm sorry! Damn it, stop ignoring me!" she yells, the sight of her best friend walking away from her causing tears to prick at the corners of her eyes. Cursing, she wipes at her eyes, desperate for the tears to go away and her focus to sharpen. Had she always been such a cry-baby?

Kira doesn't listen. She's many meters away now, angrily stalking away from her, the light blue denim of her coat becoming a blur to Iris's eyes.

A sob can be felt at the back of her throat, but she swallows it down. Why was it so hard? Was it really so difficult to speak her mind? Why didn't Kira want to listen to her? Why couldn't Iris just be normal, for once? Why did she always-

"For god's sake, Kira, I'm in love with you!"

Kira stops in her tracks.

Iris feels tears running down her cheeks. "I have been since the eighth grade," she whispers angrily.

"And I know you don't feel the same. I know that it's weird, that *I'm* weird- but damn, it's really hard not to love you! I know that I shouldn't feel this way, and that you'll hate me, but that's what I've been saying this whole time! It's best for the both of us if I don't tell you this, remember? I'm stupid, I'm unnatural, I'm gross- "

“Iris, stop it.”

Iris quietens, looking up from the ground. Kira stands there, her eyes soft in a look of sympathy. She takes a few steps towards her and wraps her arms around Iris’s shaking body.

“There is *nothing* wrong with you.”

Iris snuffles quietly.

“You know I don’t love you in the way you want me to,” Kira says quietly. “But I still love you. You’re still my best friend. You’re still Iris. You’re still the timid girl I met in the 1st grade, in the building blocks corner.”

A muffled laugh is heard from where Iris buries her head into Kira’s shoulder. Of course Kira manages to make a joke when she’s crying.

“Why didn’t you tell me you liked girls?”

Another cold tear slips down Iris’s cheek. “I guess it’s because the only girl I’ve ever felt this way about is you. I still like boys... I’m just figuring myself out.”



“Oh.”

They’re quiet. A bird chirps from a tree, and the cool autumn wind makes Iris’s pale fingers go numb from where they clamp around her best friend’s shoulders.

“But why didn’t you tell me earlier? Since the eighth grade... that was three years ago.”

Iris laughs again, a sound that sounds like it’s between a chuckle and a sob. Her mouth tastes bittersweet.

“Stupid, that’s what I’ve been trying to tell you for the past thirty minutes.”

“But after three years, only now you find the courage?”

“I don’t know. I guess it’s because of this little beach. I found out about my feelings so long ago, and we left this beach behind so many years ago too. I think about you every day, you know.” Red colour flushes in Kira’s cheeks. Embarrassment or flattery, she doesn’t know.

“Well, you had the choice to tell me.”

“And I had to voice to say so now, right?”

Kira giggles and lets go of her best friend. She gives her a small smile.

“I’m getting cold. What do you say we go back home? Mom’s got to have finished dinner by now.”

Iris nods.

“Hey, Kira?”



“Hm?”

“Please don’t think of me any differently. I promise that the feeling will fade after a while.”

“Of course, silly. I promise you’re still my best friend!”

They walk away, leaving behind the little beach.

At the same time, Iris leaves behind her feelings. This memory is one she needs to let go of, just like her more-than-friends-love for Kira. Maybe one day her heart won’t skip a beat when Kira enters the room. Maybe one day she’ll go to sleep without thinking of how strange she is for loving Kira. And maybe one day, she and Kira will sit in a college dormitory together and reminisce about the day Iris admitted her feelings for Kira. There was nothing wrong, either way. Iris would still fall for certain girls, and Kira would still love her for it.

Maybe one day, Iris wouldn’t love Kira the way she did.

THE SHIP THAT SAILS FOREVER

SHORT STORY

ELKA FELLER

Samira grimaced as her fingers curled around the mildewed oak plank. Reluctantly, she pried it from the deck. *This has to be the worst task on the ship*, she thought, setting the reeking plank as far away as possible. Samira hoisted a fresh plank from a nearby pile and lowered it down to cover the empty space in the deck.

“Ow!” A sticky pair of hands appeared to fling the plank back out of its space. “That was my head,” a voice whined. Samira peered into the darkness below the planks and caught sight of one gold-flecked eye squinting back at her. It was her friend, Jo, avoiding work as usual. “Aren’t you supposed to be on dishwashing duty?” Samira asked. “The soap irritates my skin, remember?” Jo replied with a mischievous grin. Samira rolled

her eyes.

“Just be grateful you aren’t replacing mildewed planks.” Samira gestured to her watering eyes.

“You don’t need to convince me of the stench. That smell is the first thing I notice when I wake up every morning.” Samira had forgotten that Jo lived in the G-quarters of the ship. Maintenance was notoriously poor in that sector, and all because of a petty dispute between a B-quarter passenger and her G-quarter cousin.

Jo went on, shaking her head. “Replacing the deck? All the labor of Rowing and none of the glory.” Jo poked their head higher through the gap in the deck and wondered at the rippling backs of Rowers as they strained against the

ship’s faded paddles. Samira traced her friend’s gaze and the corners of her lips crept up. “You’ll get your time to Row. For now, Jo, we have to focus on maintenance-- Captain Lugner said we’d be passing through the Straits of--”

“The Straits of Karabakh. I know, I know. *Seal even the pores in the oak*, blah, blah, blah,” Jo mimicked the captain’s lofty affect. The imitation was rough, but Samira chuckled in spite of herself. She was glad to have a break from her work; the ache in her forearms diminished and her frustration fell back.

Are you so amused by the miserable state of this deck, passenger?” Samira whirled to see Captain Lugner prowling by her work group. Jo fluttered their fingertips at her and ducked out of sight. “Not at all,” Samira replied in a practiced tone. She was careful to maintain eye contact and keep her hands still. “I’ve just a cough.” Older members of her work group raised their eyebrows at her wearily, their mouths screwed into disapproving twists. Crimson tinged the rims of Samira’s ears. The captain held her gaze for a moment, then, satisfied Samira was being truthful or at least that she had been satisfactorily humiliated, Captain Lugner turned and stalked

off, the twin tails of her coat slicing through the air before Samira’s nose. “It isn’t in your best interest to catch a cold so near to Karabakh,” she mused without breaking her stride. “Perhaps your ship will call on you to Row. It would be such a shame if you were unable.” Rage wailed in Samira’s ears. The captain always teased low-ranking passengers with the promise of Rowing-- the greatest honor for a traveler aboard the SS *Aufimmer*, for while officials constantly reminded passengers that their stores of food and supplies were ample, the *Aufimmer* had been sailing for several generations without finding a permanent dock. The rocky islands they stopped at for repairs and shelter from storms never seemed to offer more than low-

shrubs or questionable mosses, but passengers never showed doubt of finding a shore of red earth and civilized company. Thus, there was no greater honor than joining the ship's Rowers, those golden men and women who paddled passengers closer to the paradise land where the ship would dock permanently. Samira went back to work, images playing in her head of turning the heavy Rowing paddles until her hands were shredded with magnificent splinters, of proving her judgemental work crew wrong. It was nothing more than a daydream, but it helped to have something to work towards. She supposed that was the point.

That evening Samira joined a group of acquaintances in the library. They were Jo's friends and not her own, melodramatic and irritating, but with none of the charm that drew her to Jo herself. Nonetheless, she did her best to look past their loud voices and heavy footsteps. There were few on the ship her age and friends kept a passenger sane. Samira flipped through a yellowed atlas from a hundred years before. As she scanned an ancient diagram forewarning rising sea levels, she recounted her altercation with the captain.

"It isn't right," a boy with nine fingers muttered. He pored over a picture book.

"It isn't," another echoed more assertively. Her forehead was stitched with green thread and blotchy infection spread from the clumsy sewing. She placed a leather-bound tome back on its shelf. "They can't toy with us that way-- you realize we're being manipulated? Every day on this ship it's 'someday'. *Someday* we'll get to Row. *Someday* we'll make it to shore. Well someday the supplies in the hold will run out and all of us will starve. I'd like to see Lugner's reaction to that." A third, exasperated by the others' grumbling, offered his view. "If you don't like the way things are on the ship, swim. The captain has been doing the best she can, just as all of us have."

"I haven't," Jo piped.

"All of us excluding Jo," the boy accepted.

"Nevertheless," the girl with the green stitching countered. "As the long-suffering passengers of the SS *Aufimmer*, are we not entitled to the truth? Go on, tell me you haven't wondered what it would be like to see the actual state of the storeroom."

"Are you calling the captain a liar?"

"Don't rule out the possibility."

"Fine. Then we'll waltz into the storeroom tonight and you'll see supplies for decades."

"Indeed we will. And when we find the shelves empty, you'll lead the mutiny against Lugner."

Samira laughed loudly. This game of ludicrous seditions appealed to her after a day of handling the ruined wood of the ship's deck. "Yes, we'll visit the hold and ransack the first mate's room, too."

"What is there of value in the first mate's cabin?" the nine-fingered boy asked. "All we need is a peek into the hold and we'll have our answer." The girl smoothed her green stitches. Jo gazed at her with their single eye. The boy drummed his nine fingers on the table. Samira's palms were growing sweaty. It was a game, was it not? She made soft noises and blinked. After a nervous eternity, her company burst into uproarious laughter. "We had you for a moment there. Of course we're only joking. You act as though there aren't a thousand security measures around the ship's hold. We aren't the only ones who doubt the ship's resources, you know. Plenty of others have attempted a glance at the storage sector. If it was possible to sneak into the hold, believe me, someone far craftier than us would have done it already." Samira stared at her feet as ripples of laughter continued among her acquaintances. As shame blossomed in her chest, however, so an idea took root in her mind. It would not be long before she acted upon it.

"Samira, report to plank replacement immediately," Captain Lugner ordered the next morning.

"It's my day off, is it not?" Samira scrutinized the assignment sheet posted on the wall behind her.

"After you idled for a full fifteen minutes during yesterday's work? Don't be simple. Run along now, or I may be forced to assign you plank replacement tomorrow, as well, and the next day. Such a tragedy-- perhaps you would Row today if not for your negligence." Samira seethed as she approached the upper deck of the ship. The dizzying odor of rotting wood wafted to greet her and she gagged. One member of her work crew, Old Man Wallace, complained as he worked, "We passed through Karabakh when I was a boy, and have made nothing but right turns since then. I say, this cursed ship is just going in circles!" The words were absurd, but the senile ramblings of Old Man Wallace, the reek of the planks, and, above all, the captain's attitude towards her had flipped a switch deep within Samira's mind.

That day, she would do her job without complaint, stomach the lies of officials. But as soon as the sun set over the tumultuous horizon waves, Samira would hunt the truth. She had a precise arrangement in mind for that night, a scheme that would have been unthinkable just days ago, but which, in a way, she had been building up to for years. That night, Samira and Jo, along with those they had convinced to join them, snuck out of their rooms and met in the Recreation Center. The room was located just above the guarded hold, and an aroma of mystery seemed to drift up from between the oak planks of the floor. The group began to wonder if they had made a mistake-- what was their plan, exactly? Just before Samira would suggest they return to their cabins and forget the whole operation, the nine-fingered boy got down on his hands and knees to knock gently at the floor. He tugged at the plank below, but it held. The boy moved on to test others. The group was perplexed, though intrigued by his strange actions. Each tentative rap produced a blunt, percussive sound. Finally, instead of a dull thump, there was a knock that resonated warmly. Hope flickered in their chests. The boy pulled a dagger from his boot and used it to wedge the loose plank from the floor, revealing the pitch darkness of the hold below. Samira wanted to cheer. She and Jo helped the nine-fingered boy clear away more sections of the floor until they had created a hole large enough to slip through. One by one, Samira, Jo, the nine-fingered boy, and the girl with green stitches across her forehead lowered themselves into the hold. The ceiling in this part of the room was low, but they already felt impossibly far from the Recreation Center-- that mild world of laughter and pleasant diversions.

The hold was darker than the room above; not even the moon's light had the courage to violate the secrecy of the forbidden room. The four stumbled about, trying and failing to find their bearings.

"The light switch-- find the light switch," Samira urged unhelpfully.

"I'm trying, aren't I?" the green-stitched girl hissed through her teeth. She tripped and slammed to the floor. The mistake was painfully audible.

"Oy!" a gruff voice called out. They had alerted the guards.

"Time's up," Jo said, and poised herself to run.

"We're not going to get another opportunity like this," Samira rushed, desperation creeping into her voice. "Samira, this isn't a discussion. If we're caught, we could be killed." "Stop!" a guard barked. Jo and Samira exchanged a look. They scrambled through the opening in the ceiling without a backwards glance. The next day the captain called everyone to the ship's upper deck. The sky was gray and rain drizzled onto the shivering bodies of the passengers. The captain looked about icily, silencing the crowd's murmurs of disapproval.

"Passengers of the SS *Aufimmer*, I sympathize with you. We approach the dreaded Straits of Karabakh, and tensions are high. But we must remember that we will endure, just as we weathered the storm of the Jiangsu Vortex." A weak cheer rang out among the soaking passengers. "That being said," captain Lugner continued, "I suppose I must inform you of the mutiny attempted last night." Several audience members gasped. "Last night," the captain's speech was gaining intensity, "the security around our hold was breached. Evidence suggests the offenders aimed to steal food from the stores, fearing our supplies were running low. Now, these fears are natural, but I and the other officials ask for your trust. When we say there is plenty of food for everyone, we do so because it is the truth." Her eye twitched. "Again, there is no need to steal, no need to panic. Your marvelous Rowers are doing everything they can to carry you to safety. Now, if we could take a moment to applaud these mighty men and women, the very backbone of this endeavor!" The crowd clapped politely. The green-stitched girl bent and whispered to the woman standing beside her, "Why all the fuss over Rowing, anyway? This is a *sailboat*." The woman ignored her and clapped pointedly.

As the crowd dispersed and returned to their various morning assignments, Captain Lugner pulled Samira aside. She threatened in a hushed tone, "I know it was you who broke into the hold. Always asking questions, always making trouble. You know, I was like you when I was young. Why do you think they place so much security on the hold?" Samira contemplated this. "They? I thought you guarded our stores." The captain chuckled. "Guard the stores? I'm the reason they put a second padlock on the hold's hatch. I kept trying to break in to see for myself how well-stocked this ship really was." "Were you ever successful?" Samira asked, feeling like the captain and she were connecting for the first time. But as soon as the words fell from her lips, the captain's eyes darkened and her mouth pulled into a frown. "Of course not," she replied primly. "Our security force is very good at their job. Besides, I soon learned my lesson. The ship's resources are far less important than the passengers' obedience and morale. Now, off to plank duty. A spoiled deck is vulnerable to the coming storm. Remember, we're passing through the straits of Karabakh. Every precaution must and will be taken." Captain Lugner gestured to the dark clouds forming on the horizon.

"Plank replacement? For a third day?"

"You'll be done faster if you shut your mouth and begin," the captain retorted, and whatever understanding between them was lost to the crashing waves of the sea. After Samira had moved on, Lugner stared out over the undulating waters, biting her lip. She had to be more careful.

The storm of Karabakh hit the hull of the SS *Aufimmer* as a hammer hits a daisy. Even B-quarter passengers were out on the deck, tearing down sails and rushing the ship's precious paddles into below-deck containers. There was no use trying to Row through a storm such as this. One could only hunker down and hope the wind would blow the *Aufimmer* to a safe shore. Samira and the other F-quarter passengers crouched within an emergency bunker. Lightning streaked through the sky, cleaving one of the ship's masts and revealing its blackened, termite-ridden interior. While Samira pulled the iron door shut, she saw a figure in a lime green jacket. Perhaps they had lost track of their quarter-mates. The figure fluttered their fingers at her and Samira's heart sank. It was Jo; she would have recognized that wave anywhere. Not now. She took a deep breath and rushed to rescue her friend. Water had flooded the deck and now crackled with electricity. Samira waded through it cautiously. She looked up and scanned her surroundings for Jo. A flash of green disappeared through a high doorway. It was the captain's room. Jo must have been trying to use the distraction to sneak into Lugner's cabin and gather information. Samira picked up her pace and called after her friend.

She slipped and skidded partway into the room, landing face-up to witness the resentful gray clouds in the sky, the chaos of tangled lines, the shattered masts of the ship. There was a lightning-split mast tearing through the air, falling down, down. There was a flash of pain that rendered skin from muscle, muscle from bone, and then there was darkness. When Samira awoke in the unfamiliar cabin, Jo was nowhere to be seen. The back of her head was matted with a sticky substance, and stale, metallic air filled her lungs with every labored breath. A fallen mast had crushed her body from the waist down, but there was no pain, only numbness. She looked around in an attempt to distract herself. The floor was hard beneath her body, and an empty hammock swung lazily in a corner. Stretching across the entire left wall of the room was a vast teak desk. The captain's desk. Spread across it was a yellowed map of the same continents Samira had seen in the atlas from the ship's library. Samira arranged her forearms beneath her and struggled to rise. She could hear the far-off pounding of Lugner's boots as the captain rushed Medics towards her. A wave of dizziness washed over her and she slumped to the floor.

Before the Medics reached her, however, before they lifted her onto a stretcher and carried her away, Samira had caught sight of a wide, circular route scrawled in red pen, drawn onto the landmass she knew to be Eurasia. Samira thought back to Old Man Wallace's discontented ramblings about the ship "going in circles," the chart she had seen in the atlas suggesting the sea level would rise to flood entire cities. Cities, not continents. Yet a silver token rested by a region indeed marked, "Karabakh," designating their position a hundred meters above that drowned land. "We'll never arrive at a port, will we?" Samira asked feebly as she was hauled from the captain's quarters. The Medics moved briskly, but the captain's boots clicked against the damp deck, keeping up, keeping time. "No," the captain replied. "Never." They were the most honest words Samira had heard in all her years aboard the *Aufimmer*. "And the stores? How much time do we have?" The captain looked on with steely gray eyes. "You don't need to worry about the stores," she murmured. Samira believed her, but she picked up on some imperceptible shift in the Captain's tone. She had heard assurances of the abundance of their resources a thousand times. But in the past, the phrase had always been about control-- a show of the officers' strength and their power over passengers. In that moment, however, the words were meant to console her. A chill shuddered up Samira's spine as she realized why. *So be it, then*, she thought. For once, she saw the Captain's point of view with perfect clarity. If Samira survived to tell the other passengers of the drowned world and the ship's aimless circling, chaos would ensue.

The relative harmony between passengers would fall to a cutthroat anarchy, and the people of the SS *Aufimmer* would not live to deplete their supplies. This was a risk Lugner could not take. She was only doing what she must to keep her subjects safe. It had always been this way, Samira realized.

The captain stood back, her shoulders convulsing with silent sobs as the Medics tipped Samira's broken, bleeding body overboard.

