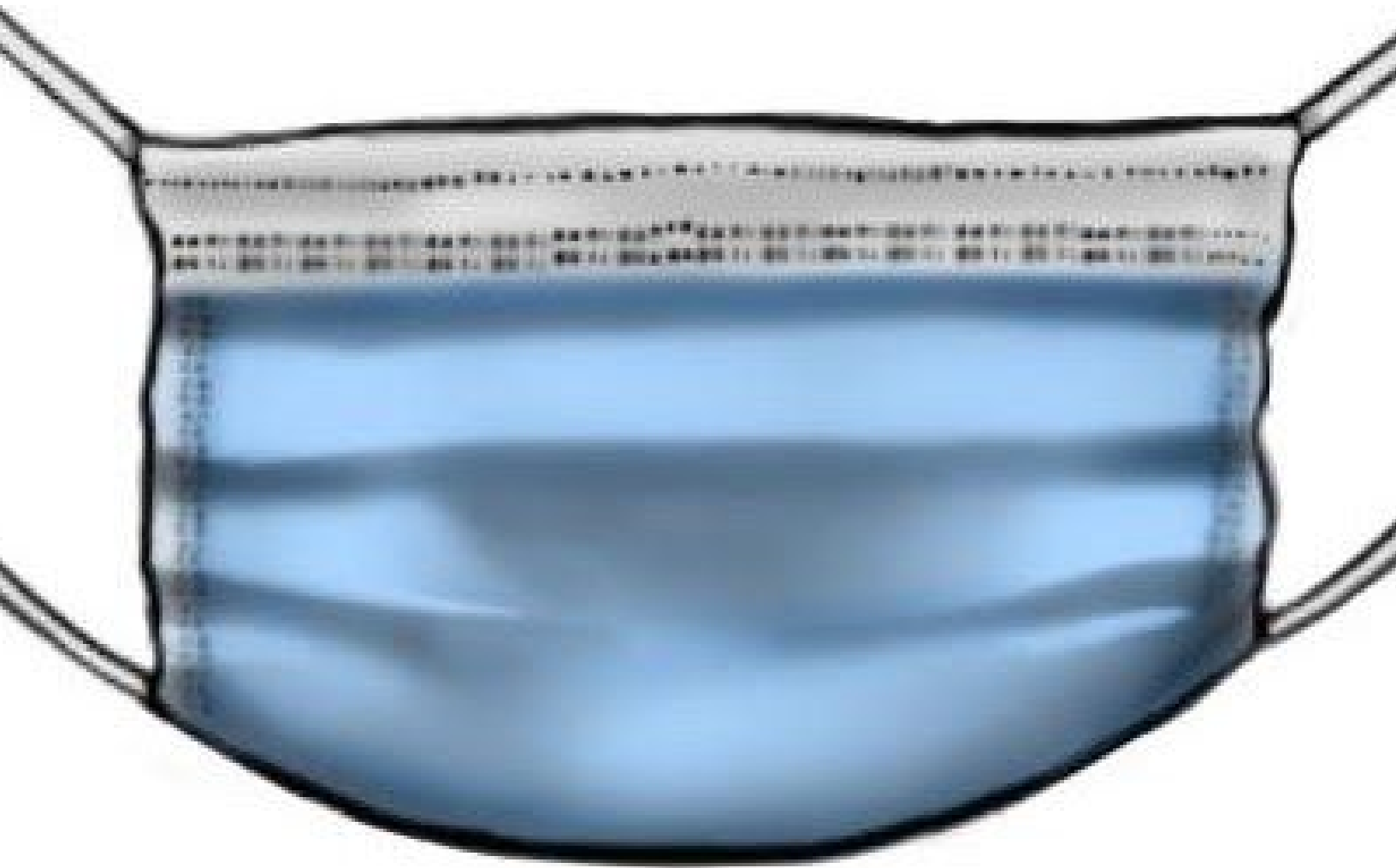


The Castle

Fall 2020 Edition





The Castle Roster

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Cover Art by Lindsey Jacobs

Poems by Hannah Sprague

The Shield Maiden

Her hair is vibrant in the wind,
a silken flag so gracefully unkempt
grandly announcing her presence.

She stands fiercely,
the picture of royalty and warrior.

Powerful, clever, and brave,
her cloud-colored dress glows
with her beauty.

It floats behind her
as it dances with the breeze
so she appears like an angel,
sent from heaven
to change the world.

Her confident smile
gently encouraging,
exuding feminine strength.

Outfly Oasis

It's almost summer again,

one final warm day

after a week of cold

hinting at cold to come.

College students become kids

and the world is a little more joyful,

alive with love and laughter.

Action is Calling

By Kaley Koran

Inspired by Natalie Isaacs

Missed Call:

Unpredictability is not a friend

Central Africa

Its weather, culture—

It is not what it used to be

Dinner party success

All cleaned into the trash can without a mess

Beauty products sold to the press

Rich enough to buy a new dress

Missed Call:

Australian smoke chokes you

But can the fire inside

Burn brighter?

Even just a spark...

Wait!

Is this dying world my roommate?

It might be too late
Can I borrow a glimmer of faith?

Missed Call:

People live in

Beautiful sceneries

Filled to the brim with wasteland:

Earth's wicked poison

Off! Are the lights necessary?
Will recycling make me weary?

Using less is my theory

Maybe less is best

Missed Call:

Need. More. Oxygen.

CO₂ emissions cloud my senses

My temperature rises

I feel so sick!

Not doing this sooner is a mystery
I need to help others change history
Minute changes put more
change in my pocket every minute

Every action helps

Big or small

This is your home

So, give it your all!

I must make a difference

That difference is us!

“1 Million Women”

To answer the call

to action

Vagueness Over Complication

By Tsering Tashi

I often confuse something that is complicated as vague. In reality, both are exquisitely separate from each other. Both put anybody off. An author's work/ideas/thoughts should be complex, not vague. Most aspiring novelists believe they will become like George Orwell, Daniel Defoe, and Toni Morrison if they write with profundity, but more importantly VAGUENESS.

They have read books by these authors and have understood that most of their writings are incomprehensible. They think if they also write with loaded vocabularies and complicate whatever they say, they will receive public applause. In fact, they then start writing baloney, and write with immaturity, and use literary devices inappropriately. In other words, their writings are unclear.

It is as if they wrote the essay with the intention of miscommunicating rather than being eloquent, oversimplifying rather than

being sophisticated, and writing vaguely rather than being concise, all because they thought that would make them sound elite.

Conveying a vague message is a sign of weakness to great writers, but great writers have channeled their temptation to write vague words, sentences, and gibberish to writing clearer and well-formed ideas and often embellishing their writings so readers get drawn to it.

Poems by Natalie Henriksen

Youth

How quickly and quietly the dawn creeps in

Of rushing cars and brushing skin

The brink of life right on her lips

For now, for now, she softly skips

Gentle, tender, soft, and sweet

Running on grass with her cold, bare feet

Not wondering how, not wondering when

But knowing that days come again and again

She thought she could have it all that night

But it turns out that she was very right;

She realized at half-past seven

That her little life could always be heaven

A Seemingly Endless World

There are so many things in the world. Objects, ideas, people.

We can't see very far across the world.

When we drive for ten minutes across the countryside, all we see is the same landscape from a different angle.

The same buildings are often still in sight; the sky does not often change. The curvature of the world is so powerful, yet unnoticed.

The three-hour drive feels like home; the extra one hundred miles feels like not much further. We are the child on the unstable canoe—our parents yell from the shoreside. If my fingernail is this small, and the universe so big, what is everything in between?

There are cars, trains, pencils,
pains, high tides, suns, rains
oceans, gates, empty plates
silver nights, and humble fates

The world is endless?

The world is endless.

This world is endless?

This world isn't endless,

But maybe it is

A Walk

A steady hand

A steady mind

A gentle sky

A steady rewind

A reaching out

A holding on

A pink that gazes into my eyes

A yellow that blinds me
A pale sky that soothes me

If the sky could protect me
If the breeze could console
me; if the trees could just
hold me with their dainty,
tender arms

Maybe then, I'd know that I
do not have to understand



the turtle
By NRAN

I can't imagine what you feel
I wish I could say that for you there was hope
But people are selfish,

and don't care about shellfish
We consume more than we care to know
There's not a single human being
that's even worthy of your trust
We all continue
to consume and consume
even though the truth is right in front of us

“Poor living creature!”
We cry and feel sorrow
but we'll still use plastic today and tomorrow
the corporations are no better
so to them I write this letter

We are here and they are there
So, please, make us care and please care as well
there is no disputing
that what we are doing
is damning them to this hell

I know you can afford the change
so why won't you take that step forward?
it's hard to stop using straws
when it's unspoken law
and a solution is only your word

Until you help us help the sea
I don't know what you expect us to do
there's only so much
that we have in our clutch
in this game of chess, so it's your move

Origins of Growth

By Gisselle Hernandez

I am from waking up early morning to the late long drive home.

I am from the blazing hot sun to the long rainy days.

I am from the tropical palm trees that sway back and forth on lovely clean days.

I am from the harvesting fruits and vegetables that grow in my mom's garden to the prickly nopales that grow in the garden, to the daisies that blossom.

I am from the fresh harvesting fruits and vegetables that go to seed to table.

I am from the fresh lake water.

I am from the hot foods to the antojitos of flavorful foods.

I am from the traditional game of La loteria to the boots that stomp every Saturday night.

I am from the Vapor Rub so-called cure.

I am from the Abuelita hot chocolate during the winter season.

I am from the flour, chicken, and salsas that make up the tamales.

I am from the handmade embroidered blouses and vibrant blankets.

I am from the ranch with views and dreams.

I am from the butterflies that fly high in the sky.

I am from the “no I cannot” to “*todo es posible*”

Poems by Ali Ali

Ode To Helios

Helios upon his chariot,
racing through the sky!
Eyes glowing with celestial fire,
piercing through your lies!
Overlord of the sun!
Over the skyroad he runs!
Beginning at rooster's call,
ending at nightfall.

Crossroads

Where do I go from here?
To the beaten path?
I know where it ends.
Through the tall grass?
I should turn back instead.

But when I turn around,
I see nothing left for me.
Just this one question,
For miserable company.

Loose

Just another cog in the machine,
Turning in tandem with the rest.
Boy, I'm feeling loose today!
Surely if I left I wouldn't be missed.
The gears would likely still turn.
There's many like me to be found.
If it's really that important,
Someone will find a replacement.
Besides, what worth is one small cog
To this whole machine?
I guess we'll find out.
I'm feeling loose today.

Echos

“Contact!”

Combat.

“Commo!”

“Get down!”

Fall back.

“Cover me!”

Retreat.

Fire back.

Repeat.

Backstreets.

Bust door.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Dust cloud.

On the floor.

Cough out.

Headcount

Pat down.

Hand red.

What bled?

“Private,

You’re up!”

Light head.

Falling.

“Private,

Get up!”

“Man down!”

“He’s dead!”

“Wake up!”

Wake up?

Wake up...

Chicago COVID

By GDRM

Sirens in the background

Perhaps another covid case

Or a drug dealer the opps found

Shots fired forgetting lives cannot be replaced

Some claim it is all a conspiracy

For population control and such

Or maybe because of 5G

Regardless I miss my old life very much

One day it will flip because bad times do not last

Watch out for karma because it catches on fast

Yeah it may get bad but the good will always be better

We will go back to only complaining about the weather

By then rona's damage will already be done

But never will I take for granted opportunities for fun

So much time wasted while we stuck at home

And remember there is more to life than what is on your phone

read these like you're out of breath

Poems by Keith Castillo

Expectations

Even with setting the bar so low, I still manage to bang my head against it.

Maybe, I'm stupid for you, or I'm stupid in general,
not stupid, foolish dashed with confusion, fits,
My beliefs and ideas don't match with those that you've sat with
You got close to me, as I warmly welcomed you in,
The best vampire that waltzed into my heart and left all the blood within,
Keeping every vein intact, keeping my brain in tune,
You kept your spirit, as mine kept changing,
The stability, was, questionable, maybe a bit shaky,
It's not often you stand inside feeling the rain.

When you stood on the doorstep, knocking so slowly,
I open the door with hesitancy, you stand so cautiously
As we wished to hold each other once more, I held another only the night before, and
Maybe I laughed more, got more of a chuckle. No, they, they weren't you but,
You still cause a ruckus so loud that I must ask
"Can you describe it" or, maybe even define it. put it into a Quizlet set—

Teach me new vocabulary, let me get half the definitions right then call it a night.
While it feels only, half right. With no test in sight.

I have no expectations

Hell, Do I even have a heart? A question I shouldn't ask since

I would not feel all this pain

I would not see all these bloodstains

I would not stare at the ceiling-exhausted-tired losing brain cells to something that

Already was, not worth my time.

I have no expectations; I don't even have you

I have myself and that's all I expect,

That's what I expected from you

I want to stop looking at you

I want to stop looking at you, every glance is a crack in the door I refuse to open
Held back by warped pieces of wood, cut from the tree that continues to grow
Splintered and fractured by phone calls
Text messages that file it away,
Broken open by time
Knowing your heart braves, the flood, the memories and time,
Every time I hear your laugh, I remember what once was,
Now you don't even look the same. To me you look better,
Maybe happier, now, once beyond those doors and once the flood had passed
Better in ways I never dreamed you could be, which brings some happiness back
Even if, I'm wrong, I know you'll still wave hello, if it brings us both pains, we just let it all go
We push to let it go.

It'll never be fun, it never began with fun, you look so focused sitting there,
Then when I glance over you remember those moments too
Stuck in that seat, while moving through time,
You remember those laughs like I do. Swaying steps and moments of grace
We nearly fell on our face, you roasted me every single day
I gave you shit as you had nothing left to say, only laughter and maybe some tear
I never got to you to pee yourself but, I came pretty close
Even though the jokes about me never let up, it

Relentlessly—maybe a bit brutal,
You gave me time to be a mess and never laughed in my face
Even though you gave me a hard time, I made fun of you too
Sharing laughs that annoyed the neighbors at times,
We both missed that.

We both had our moments where we'd thought we were both fools
Fools in love.

Even a fool can see how stupid I am, you probably can too
Carrying feelings of unrequited love like airplanes missing cargo from the terminal
With malfunctions and seating issues for hours on end,
The arrival of love, never departing.
So, you ask the terminal when the plane may leave, Or,
If you'll get out on time, possibly a meal voucher for every hour spent in this place with a
chance at a free hotel room, complimentary WIFI, and some peace of mind, but a response
comes by saying—

“Maybe at like two or ten” is the only answer you get, you sigh with defeat
Just across from hers, as she pulls out her phone
“I want to stop looking at you.” As it rings through your head.
As you try to get home.

Left Hanging

You'd think that hug would have fixed things,
Breaking rules of contact and germs,
We would have felt the same things we felt before,

We barely had the time to plan it out, our pandemic love only—
Broke, we fell like pieces to the ground and kicked them around,
We stepped away from the mess, only leaving the dead air to blow away,
Well, we tried.

I wondered what it was like, for you to be by yourself,
In solitude, or fighting the loneliness,
To ignore the past and pretend those words don't matter, those words
don't change your view.

Those feelings never grew past that day in June.

You never grew past that day we met,
You blinded yourself to the truth,
The expiration date written on the bottle,
Rubbed off by our hopeless attempts to drink from it,

Timeless, yet, even mountains break down,
Valleys grow deeper or flood to new brinks
Forests catch fire, only scarring the land for years to come

Even time heals all, yet, once you let go,
Everything was still the same,
Only now, I knew I could let you go.

Morning at Iverson Point

By Andrew Buchheim

Some years ago in early September, a friend of mine initiated me into a small act of rebellion. We were only boys at that time, probably no older than twelve, and accordingly, our plan was simply to sneak off to the beach on the second Friday after school began. The plan was charged with the same sort of puerile excitement usually afforded to birthdays and field trips, and though I wasn't too keen on the idea at first, it became difficult to contain my anticipation as the date approached. Elliot Springer, my companion, was a flighty boy with dark, unkempt, curly hair and a spattering of freckles; he had a long streak of mischief at our school but had quickly learned how to fast talk the headmaster into letting him off. As I waved goodbye to my mother from the porch steps, I saw him looking down, fixedly crunching his loafers on the gravel of our long driveway.

"Hi there," I called out to him. Elliot lifted his head up to acknowledge me briefly, then looked back down at the gravel with a casual smirk. We began in the direction of the bus stop, and I attempted several times to start a conversation. Instinctually, we increased our pace after passing behind the line of pine trees that bordered my family's property. Clearly set on getting to the beach as soon as we could, Elliot responded with short, bored replies. It annoyed me, walking along the quiet country lane with someone seemingly uninterested but undoubtedly humming

with the same nervous excitement. He strode so coolly, as if by himself, when only a week ago he had chattered about stealing two dollars from his mother's purse to pay for ice cream when we got there.

I ought to calm myself down, I thought: I've been swimming at Iverson Point since before I was four years old. Still, as we passed a road sign alerting us that our destination was only a mile east, I could not suppress that wonderful anticipation. The mere fact of our misbehavior gave every step—every breath—a sort of swagger that was almost as exciting as our destination. Even in the waning end of summer, the morning was comfortable, inviting even, in its brilliance as we walked toward the rising sun. There was a characteristic crispness of early autumn that at least kept our shoes dry as we paced down the side of the asphalt road, and some of the oaks on either side of us were just starting to turn. The nearby droning of cicadas distracted from the reticence to which I had been subjected, and I was content to take in the New England September for a little while longer.

“D’ya think Aaron McKay will be there again?” Elliot finally asked. “He was at Iverson Point when I came around in May, and we had a good time with some girls from St. Emily’s.”

“I hope he’s there,” I responded with a little enthusiasm. A car approached from behind, and as it passed, I shouted in affirmation: “I hear he’s always skipping classes to go swimming with girls from St. Emily’s.” I really didn’t like Aaron; he tended to talk down to you when he was around girls, and every joke felt like it was at

your expense. He was two years older, though, and he'd had quite a growth spurt, so perhaps it was just some feeling of superiority older boys seem to always grow into. Elliot was good friends with him despite this, and the two often went off on their own to chat and chuckle about things invariably unknown to me. Out of the side of my eye, I watched him instinctively loosen his striped uniform tie in anticipation—Aaron always wore his uniform with the top shirt button undone and the tie half-loosened. Elliot gave that same silent smirk as he did it, unsubtly revealing his own eagerness.

As we neared the end of the road, I could see the sparkling blue of the Atlantic, and my pace quickened. Iverson Point, just ahead, was a shady, crescent-shaped inlet to the north, bordered mostly by ancient cedars and maples. To the south, there was a fairly long, grassy beach usually dotted with umbrellas and changing tents and lifeguard stands and the like; today it was almost empty, save for a towel laid out by the dunes. Elliot cut in front of me as we reached the boardwalk, swiftly took off his shoes and socks, and started running. A large, red-haired boy waved distantly from under the shade of the inlet, presumably Aaron McKay. I followed behind, silently groaning at the new fate of my day.

Elliot dashed toward the changing tent at the entrance to the beach, bursting through the canvas flap. I waited outside with crossed arms and a blank face. He emerged quickly, dropping his backpack and blazer upon the exposed roots of a tree on the edge of the water. Aaron stood across the inlet, shirtless in striped swimming

trunks, brashly signaling the two of us over. In the midst of the rush, Elliot's two dollars were tossed out of his blazer pocket and floated to the ground in front of me—I picked them up and placed my own backpack next to his. Splashing through the water around the curve of the inlet, Elliot yelled something inscrutable at Aaron. It earned a chorus of giggles from his entourage of girls seated in a half-circle on a ledge above the shore. Sitting down upon a nearby stone, I removed my loafers and socks, looking anxiously upon the crowd across the inlet; tinny music emitted from a little red portable radio the leftmost girl held. As I rolled up the cuffs of my trousers, I opted to buy myself an ice cream cone with the money I'd just rescued.

I crossed the dunes between the inlet and the coast, looking for the ice cream stand usually located on the beach. It wasn't there. Something caught my eye out in the Atlantic, however. A large, bright pink pneumatic raft bobbed gently, resting quite a distance out from shore. Upon it lay a girl in an azure swimsuit glittering under the sun. Almost unconsciously, I walked forward. As I neared the shore, I could tell she had wavy brown hair, slick from the saltwater, fanning out across the raft. Sunglasses rested upon a long, thin nose above closed lips held in a slight smile. The awful music from the inlet faded away, and all I could hear was the murmuring rush of breaking waves and the breeze above me.

This moment of obliviousness abruptly ended as I realized I was the only soul left on the shore, rather obviously staring at this girl. Glancing one last time at her shining bronze form, I quickly turned away with dreadful embarrassment. My face

blushed red hot as I trotted barefoot through the sand toward the changing room, where I swiftly changed into my swimming trunks. Emerging, I looked out at Elliot and the others, who now bounced heedlessly in the water of the inlet, splashing each other with loud, ugly shouts. The girl with the radio screamed as Aaron toppled her, and my jaw clenched in a momentary cringe. A half-hearted wave toward Elliot went unreciprocated, so I walked off without fearing they would miss me.

Furtively, I reapproached the shore. This time, however, the girl looked up, lifting her sunglasses for a second then lowering them again. She sat up cross-legged and waved. I waved back. As I entered the water, I looked away momentarily, trying to remain aloof. Glancing back, though, she seemed to be gesturing me over. With a rigid stroke, I swam out to the raft where she rested, staring out at the inlet behind her plastic sunglasses. She gave me her hand with a laughing “hello”, and I scrambled up. I felt utterly graceless as my skinny, dripping body upset the raft, but finally, we balanced ourselves.

“You’re the only person I’ve seen on this beach today, you know,” she started. I looked at her, puzzled and transfixed by the glow of her visage. “I was awfully bored and just thought it would be rude not to say hello.” She smiled, and I smiled back.

“I’m glad you called me over,” I said charmlessly, still entranced. “I was feeling awfully bored myself, but now I’ve got someone to talk with.”

“How old are you?” she asked, tilting her head slightly. I told her the truth and she laughed. “Why aren’t you in school? It’s a Friday morning, isn’t it?”

“My friend and I skipped classes to come today,” I responded. Perhaps too eagerly, I also added that we’d been planning this day for months.

“Well why aren’t you with him right now?” she questioned lightly. I shook my head with lowered eyebrows and a slight frown. Frankly, I’m not sure I could’ve explained to myself the growing animosity I felt toward Elliot that day, and there was certainly no need to try and explain it to this girl.

“I just came out to swim for a little,” I said evasively. She nodded. For a moment, we both looked upon the cloudless horizon stretching before us, before the lazy chopping of incoming waves. There was a peace to our silence for those few seconds. It was her grace, perhaps, or her composure that pacified my habit of thoughtless chatter. After a moment, she began again, still looking ahead.

“The ocean looks wonderful today, don’t you think? They always say the Atlantic is so cold and cruel, but it hasn’t been that way to me this whole summer. I’ve sat out on this raft since the sunrise and haven’t so much as been splashed by a wave.” She said this with another curious smile; her voice was wispy, carried over to me like smoke in the breeze.

We went on like this for at least two hours. At first, it was just aimless commentary on the seagulls overhead; how odd it was that Iverson Point was vacant on a warm summer day, where those occasional gleeful shouts were coming from. Then somehow, I was in the midst of a story about the time I went sailing down in Chesapeake with an older cousin when a sea squall rolled in; she reciprocated,

recounting the night she'd waved goodbye to her father from the dock as he boarded a steamship to Europe. We moved to our schooling—she recently graduated from St. Emily's—our families, our houses, our favorite poems, our last vacation. Evidently, she had swum at Iverson Point every day for the past month. The girl spoke with that same ethereal tone, and she continued to look out upon the ocean, only changing focus to listen more deeply. On the raft, we sat alone for ages, cross-legged and calm.

A distant call broke our repose. Elliot stood among the tall grass in the dunes, waving wildly to gesture toward my return to shore. Begrudgingly, I slipped into the water and made a hasty beat toward the outer trees of the inlet. The Atlantic felt awfully cold after warming in the sun for hours.

“It was nice to meet you!” she called as I departed. I looked back and grinned, but she was already again looking at the horizon. I reached the shore, dressed, and started an urgent jog with Elliot back to the bus stop.

...

Before dawn the next morning, I awoke and crept out of my bedroom. The stars were just retreating as I neared the end of the driveway, and I treaded quietly in the grass to avoid waking my mother, a notoriously light sleeper. She'd certainly be concerned to know I was making a habit of sneaking off to Iverson Point. On our walk back the day prior, Elliot had prated on about some girl he'd flirted with the whole morning; he'd carried himself taller, but he still walked with the stride of a child

imitating an adult, like he was clomping around in his father's shoes. I paid little attention to hearing how he'd nearly kissed her or how Aaron was starting to grow a mustache. Instead, that girl's poised figure, gleaming in the sun, entranced my mind's eye. Rather than engage in idle chatter, I planned a return trip to Iverson Point with the hopes of speaking to her again, or seeing her at the very least.

As I neared the end of the road, the howling wind whipped off of the Atlantic. The horizon, now a luminous grey, sat atop manifold black waves, opaquely cresting and crashing along the shore. I entered the park, this time examining a sign we had ignored in our rush yesterday. It read "HIGH HAZARD: HIGH SURF AND STRONG CURRENTS" in bold red lettering. Under screaming gales and a sudden burst of rain droplets, I removed my shoes and socks before running off the boardwalk and onto the beach. Passing the sand dunes, there was a familiar object caught among the grass and the scraggly bushes on the periphery. It was the pink pneumatic raft, now punctured, deflated, and soaking wet. With a full view of the coast, I stopped.

A form rested flat upon the dark sand of the shore. I walked slowly, with instant terror pounding with my heart through my veins, into my shaking hands.

Motionless, she lay face up. Her cracked sunglasses were cast aside, exposing misty blue eyes that stared off into the eternity above her. I could see the glint of glowing daylight reflected in them. Her lips, slightly parted, took on an icy cerulean hue. Her skin still glistened, now with a sapphire tint. Waves crashed around her but

she did not move; she did not breathe. Entwined through her hair like emerald ribbons were strands of kelp and seaweed. I stood above her for some time, silent and fixated.

The pulsing dread of the discovery relented, and I was left with a vague, grey emptiness. I could not seem to produce tears but still shook as if sobbing, chilled to the bone. She remained entirely still, and I backed away, uncertain, looking out at the horizon and the tumultuous black Atlantic. What was there to do? She was gone and I hadn't even learned this poor girl's name. She died in anonymity. With a grimace, I left her there.

In vain, I ran toward home, across the sand and down the boardwalk and past the trees and up the gravel drive. Behind me, a warmthless sun rose.



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