



GUILD OF YOUNG WRITERS

SHORT
STORIES

POETRY

SCREENWRITING

VOLUME FOUR
WINTER
2021

BOOK LAUNCH

Celebrating Two Local Emerging Author
Anthology Releases!

Story Studio Writing Society is located on the traditional territories of the **W**SÁNEĆ and Lkwungen-speaking peoples. We respectfully acknowledge and thank the Lkwungen People, also known as the Songhees and Esquimalt First Nations communities, for allowing us to live, work, learn, play and create on their lands.

Through the work we do on the territory, we are accountable to the following communities: Esquimalt, Songhees, **ST**ÁUT**W** (Tsawout), **W**JOLÉLP (Tsartlip), **BO**KEĆEN (Pauquachin), **M**ÁLEXEŁ (Malahat), **W**SÍ**K**EM (Tseycum), T'Sou-ke Nation, Scia'new Nation and Nuu-chah-nulth: Pacheedaht Nations.

We acknowledge that the historical relationship to the land and territories of these peoples continues to this day.

As an education based organization, we recognize that we have the responsibility to work towards truth and reconciliation, and to remain open to suggestions, consultations, and partnerships, especially with local Indigenous communities and organizations, on how our organization can continue to work towards reconciliation.

We hope that Story Studio's programing and publications create a safe, welcoming and engaging environment for all people, including Indigenous peoples.

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From Zombie fighting to
contemporary fiction, find a new title
to add to your TBR piles!



Editor's Note

It has been a busy season for Story Studio and the Guild of Young Writers! Our community of writers was finally able to celebrate in person at our first Book Launch held at the GVPL atrium in November. The Book Launch brought together over 25 local young writers who contributed stories to 'Imaginary Victoria' and 'A Portal to Our World' anthologies, along with local guest authors and illustrators who supported young writers in crafting their stories over the summer months. We are so proud of these publications and each of the new authors. Copies of each anthology are available within the central GVPL collection, as well as featured in the Emerging Local Authors collection. If you are interested in purchasing a copy of your own, please contact us at info@storystudio.ca

We were also joined by Shannon Rayne in November, who led us in a fantastic screenwriting and flash fiction workshop. We learned how to create short films from one minute writing warm ups, exploring the creativity and fun twists in telling a story visually.

Many of our writers also took the opportunity this month to join in on NaNoWriMo, National Novel Writing Month, to continue already started projects, or as a means of kicking off new stories. A busy season of writing indeed!

Enjoy the stories, poems, and perspectives the Guild has to share with you this holiday season. Wishing you all a warm and magical holiday.



Rebecca Ruiter
PROGRAM MANAGER

CELEBRATING LOCAL YOUNG AUTHORS



On November 20th over twenty-five local young writers from two of our summer programs were able to meet in person for the first time! Story Studio hosted our first Book Launch at the GVPL atrium for our published anthologies, **'A Portal to Our World'** and **'Imaginary Victoria'**. Young authors from across Victoria contributed stories, poems and excerpts from their novels shared in 'A Portal to our World'. Others had a chance to work collaboratively in building a magical setting for the city of Victoria, writing individual stories reflecting on many locations within the city during an outbreak of magic! After a full summer of writing, and welcoming many new participants into our Guild this fall, it was delightful to see the connections these writers have made in these virtual programs come to fruition.

Physical copies of both anthologies will be available in GVPL's Local Emerging Authors collection in January 2022! If you're interested in supporting Story Studio and our Young Writer's by purchasing a copy of your own, contact us at info@storystudio.ca



“ Start writing, no matter what.
The water does not flow until the faucet is
turned on. ”

- LOUIS L'AMOUR



new voices

THIS QUARTER

I'm Kahlan, I am a feminist and environmentalist who loves reading, writing, and listening to podcasts.

I'm Kira, a storyteller and musician who has a passion for nature and the beauty that can be found in small things.

I'm Nikolai and I love art and writing, both of which I hope to work on over the holidays. I also hope there will be snow!

I'm Ava! I have a passion for writing, reading, being outdoors and travelling around the world. I look forward to snow and hot chocolate over the holidays!

Hi! I'm Florence. I love art, poetry, being outdoors (when its not raining), and Studio Ghibli movies. I have lived in Kenya, Uganda, Rome, Los Angeles and Canada and gone to nine different school from K to Grade nine.

COZY UP WITH THESE READING RECOMMENDATIONS

- **LORE**
- ALEXANDRA BRACKEN
- **CODE TALKER**
- JOSEPH BRUCHAC
- **LOBIZONA**
- ROMINA GARBER
- **GREENGRASS HOUSE**
- KATE MILFORD
- **THE SONG OF ACHILLES**
- MADELINE MILLER
- **LIKE A LOVE STORY**
- ABDI NAZEMIAN
- **HEART OF IRON**
- ASHLEY POSTON
- **LONG WAY DOWN**
- JASON REYNOLDS
- **MIND GAMES**
- KIERSTEN WHITE



SCREENWRITING & MICROFILMS



"THAT'S THE POWER OF FILM, IT BECOMES AN
IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCE" ~SHANNON RAYNE

The Guild was excited to welcome creative writer, Shannon Rayne, in November to lead a Screenwriting and Microfilms workshop with us. We tried our hand at some one minute writing prompts and then began exploring the idea of creating films from these short 3-5 sentence writings. We watched examples of microfilms, such as Liv McNeil's 'Numb', and discussed the music and images that aid in telling a story visually.

We learned many things, but one piece of advice that stuck with us was the understanding of the changes and differences each story takes throughout the creative process. Shannon says, "There is the story you write, the story you shoot, and then the story you edit." A few members of the Guild branched out from their short stories and poetry to try scriptwriting, and some have taken on the challenge of exploring filming.

ACT 2: SCENE 1: THE OTHER SISTER

Act 1 recap: After the Awakening, where Granny Hostage dies, Crystal and Jewel team up to defeat Tara, Jewel's mother. Everything is back to normal, right?

*It is three pm in the east of the island.
A young girl, **JEWEL**, with magenta-purple hair and light grey eyes, is in a large study, busy reading a book in her hands. Her feet are propped up onto her table.*

[The door bangs open, a **HOODED FIGURE** walks their way into the room]

HOODED FIGURE, says with a bunch of mischief and delight in her voice:
So, you are the Jewel that I have heard everyone talk about.

(**JEWEL** instantly throws down her book and picks up her wand, pointing at the **HOODED FIGURE**)

JEWEL, stammering: W-who are you?

HOODED FIGURE: No one. Give me Granny Hostage's wand.

JEWEL, yelling: No!

HOODED FIGURE: Lapratis-

JEWEL: Traville-blue!

(**JEWEL** disappears. **HOODED FIGURE** instantly searches all the drawers.)

HOODED FIGURE, yelling: where is Granny Hostage's Wand?

HOODED FIGURE, glaring at the audience: You spoiled Jewel. I will get revenge on you.

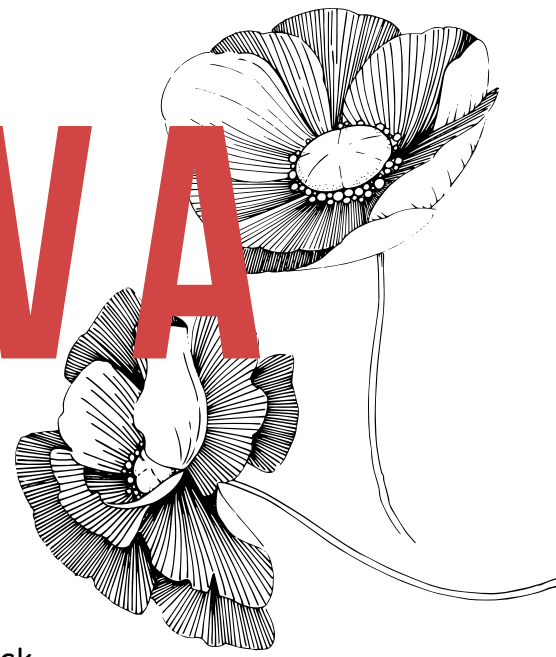


Poetry

SHARE YOUR WORDS



AVA



YOU WILL BE REMEMBERED

Gunshots split the air
Bullets intertwine
They said it would be fair
But why am I so blind?

Death to my right
Ruin to my left
How can I fight
With a heart in my chest?

Take aim and fire
Don't look back
To the ghost's choir
Their voices attack

That's what I was told
So long ago
"Try to be bold"
But where do I go?

There's nowhere to run
Nowhere to hide
What's done is done
I have to abide

By the deathly machine
Grasped in my hand
I'm only eighteen
But I must stand

I take my shot
I don't look back
But I am caught
My vision goes black

How is this right?
The blood on my chest
The medal in my sight
It belongs on my breast

The war rages on
And the setting sun
Rolls over the body
Of a poor man's son

I take my last breath
Send word to my mother
The news of my death
The loss of another

So many fought
So many lost
A single shot
A regretful cost

But we hear the voice
Whisper
Rest my dear.
Please do not fear.
For you will be remembered.

HOPE IN A NEW PATH

There are those who hold their heads up,
Walking down the halls with the uttermost confidence,
While some lay back, with their friends, and chatter,
About their classes and what they heard the other day.

They are those who have the slight bit of fear in their eyes,
As they hurry down the halls to their next class,
Scared to be late,
Scared that they won't have enough
time to finish the homework they have not done.

They are those who are anxious,
It's a new world they live in,
Five days a week,
Five times a day,
Crowded halls with people they don't know,
And who they will never know,
or who will never know them.

But there are those tiny sparks people share,
Hidden behind the mask that blocks their smile,
But we can see it through their eyes.

There are those who wave at you,
Even though you barely know them,
But that's okay,

Because all we need is a smile and a wave,
To get us through our long days.





DEAR EX-BESTFRIEND

I loved the summer days spent on your trampoline.
I loved how could tell you anything.
I loved you.
I miss watching Trolls in your car after soccer.
I miss our inside jokes.
I miss you sometimes too.
I'm sorry too.
I'm sorry we didn't last.
I'm sorry Best Friends Forever really meant until fifth
grade.
I'm sorry we drifted apart.
I'm sorry about the barbed comments.
I sorry we can't repair what we broke.
But thank you.
Thank you for the memories.
Thank you for the love.
Thank you for your loyalty.
Thank you for being there.

Love,
Your ex-bestfriend.



CAMERON

DEAR JUBILEE

Time's rotting cadaver has taught me what not to say to you
Driven eggshells into my feet after all the times I stepped on them
I've gotten better though.
For you, I have.
Better at being my own teacher, being the one to quell the bright, attention-drawing scribble
you created
At least I'll let him down gently.

But still your judgement runs across my skin like teardrops,
melting over every corrugation and imperfection and corroding it with your hot acid
Does it hurt?
Of course.
But I can't blame you for eating away at my skin like this, no,
Because I starve when all I eat are my words
I bleed when all I bite are my bullets
And I cry when all I think of is you, Jubilee

You are my connection, always have, should have been
You're my comma, my tendon, my knowing nod shared between strangers
And I am always a stranger, always the estranged
Because it's easier to mark lines and place barriers on your affection
Than to have your clockwork trains splattered with the truth
And the absence of ironed-out, hot printed lies would seem like filth to you, wouldn't it?
Because it's easier for me to teach myself how to hide the scars on my face than for you to
teach me how to stop them from forming
And to you, Jubilee, my face is destruction
Because yours is the one always saved

You know you can leave now.
I wouldn't care, and you clearly don't.
But all I ask is that you don't forget about me.
Don't forget that I never left my room neat and tidy for you.

Don't forget that you might miss the sounds of my broken record, once it crackles to a close.

Don't forget that a hero's death is not a compliment.

Don't forget that I was never a compliment to you.

Because I will always remember.

VINCULUM

Another one of life's lessons
Plodding and bored and whipping dead horses
How do we calculate irony?
I don't know.

It sounds like geometry, like me.
Like triangles, like change.

I break triangles
Take my line of broken promises
And pay with it to die handsomely
By the point of origin,
Two shards of a shattered, snake-tongued solace reforged
Into a bound, blinded arrowhead.
A geometric, calculated fate.
Did they cry for Theseus,
Their hero turned to nothing more
Than a lump of useless, sorrowful flesh?
Will they cry for me as I have cried for them?

After all, I am nothing more than a lamb.
I scrape, I bleed and I learn,
Only to be sacrificed to the cliffs over a battle that should never have been
mine
I call out, but nobody comes

Sleepy eyelids close, sealing my coffin yet leaving me
Broken in a salty, waiting ocean grave.
And I conclude, as her greatest villain dies a hero's death
"You cannot calculate irony, when time turns to sand.
You can only hope, as you live and you die by its hand."



TOGETHER

DESIRES

Stuck in the desires,
But we don't mind.
We like the desires,
They take us and show us.
We don't have to try, we can get lost in
them.
So they are our guide book, leading us
through life.
They never let go
We never fight back.
We stay in these longings. Wanting,
needing. Getting, having.
These desires.

I was lost in the warm embrace,
It held me tight and sheltered me.
There was no race,
All we had to do was be.
There was nothing else

I'M JUST HUMAN

Behind a mask,
Hiding away from the truth
I'm broken, left hopeless
Behind a mask
Not enough
Running away from being human
Behind a mask
I'm not perfect
Just human
Behind a mask,
I'm acting
Giving up
Behind a mask,
Trying to hide



ORIGIN STORY

There was light and dark,
An origin story.
Suddenly light exploded in a world of darkness,
Shattering the emptiness
And making a new world.
A world where everything began.
The world where everyone started.

The window of impossible, broke, letting all the light trail in.
All the impossible was possible,
The light conquered, the darkness left.
They saw for the first time, life was good.
That there was a life.
And it was worth living.

In a moment it changed everything,
The darkness was blinding, then they were able to see.
Fire entered and it burned through the old.
The world was born anew!
It was different, changed.
There was a gleam of hope in the void,
It shone brightly, illuminating everyone's hearts.

And there was life.



How could you- believe us when we say we're
okay with blood on our faces like tears?

-Kira





BETRAYED

An excerpt by Lola

Chapter Two

"I am very disappointed in you Jack. I expected better."

Jack bows his head and I sit straight up in my chair trying not to laugh. Jack truly looks upset for messing up so bad. "It will never happen again sir, I promise," he says.

"Still, there must be consequences for this. It could have been worse."

"I didn't do anything wrong!"

I put in and Jack glares in my general direction.

Boss just laughs and says, "Ailith, you are dismissed. Jack, stay here and we will discuss more after she leaves."

I walk out of the room. It is midnight and there are long shadows lining the dark hallways. This mansion we live in is so big. My uncle Jacob, who also happens to be the boss of the 'company,' is strict with rules. My other uncle Kai, is a traitor. He betrayed us on a mission, getting five of our best spies captured. Including my best friend.

To be fair, I guess he switched over to the 'good side' since we steal stuff from museums and other places. My uncle took me in as a baby after my parents were killed by the police on a mission. We have been in the dark trades for a long time and now have millions of dollars. Today Jack and I stole 12500 dollars worth of gems for my uncle.

I walk the five stairways up to my tower room to find my two dogs Knife and Dagger on my bed. I smile and walk over to them. "Hey guys, how are you?"

They wag their fluffy tails and run over to me. Knife is a chocolate lab and Dagger is a light golden retriever. I fill up their food bowls and sit on my bed, counting the seconds until my uncle comes into my room.

Soon enough he storms in, scaring Knife and Blade. They run over to protect me.

"Calm down guys, come here," I gesture to the bed and they settle down on either side of me.

"Can you believe that guy? I have half the mind to fire him on the spot. If he wasn't normally a great spy he would be packing his bags right now." He sits down on the edge of the bed and sighs, "Are you okay? Sorry for ordering you out of the office like that, I am just very frustrated at everything and everyone right now." He settles down next to me and Knife scooches onto his lap.

"I'm fine."

"Jack claims he did not trigger anything and no one saw him. So how did the alarm go off?"

"Could this be Kai's work? I mean I know we haven't seen him in a while but..." Uncle shakes his head, then stops.

"Well, we can check. If we can get back into the museum. We can steal the record films and see if he is in them reporting to us."

I nod along with the idea, he looks thoughtful for a second. "Wait uncle, who were you thinking would go on this risky mission? I mean the museum is crawling with officers. Whoever you send would have to be an amazingly skilled spy." I gesture to myself with my hand but he is lost in his own thoughts and does not notice.

"You're right. I need to send someone skilled."

I nod, "Go on."

"I should send Valarie, Terra and Leo."

I slap my hand to my forehead, "No uncle. Send me, I would be perfect for this mission."

He looks at me shocked. "You? No way, it is extremely dangerous. I would never send you, this could be a suicide mission. No, it is way too risky."

"But you sent me to the museum for the first mission. Why not this one?"

He shakes his head, "No way. You are not going." He claps his hands together six times signaling a delivery person wanted in the room.

A red faced young man comes running in panting. "Yes sir, need something delivered sir?"

Uncle grabs some ink and three scrolls and quickly scribbles some information that they have been selected for a dangerous mission, blah blah blah. Instructions to meet in a certain place and a certain time to discuss the details. I frown the entire time. Once he is done, he seals the notes and hands them to the mailman. "Please bring these to Miss Terra, Mister Leo and Miss Aria. Tell them they are of most importance and need to be opened immediately when delivered."

The mail guy runs off with the letters. I notice he did not include Valarie, he probably decided she was not good enough.

"Now, get some sleep Ailith, you had a long day. I will see you at breakfast tomorrow." He pets Knife one last time and then walks out of the room.

I have been holding in all my anger so I unleash it on the pillow that Dagger is lying on.

"Why doesn't he see I am not a little kid anymore, I am fifteen for goodness sake. Fifteen."

I slip two of my four knives out of my spy suit and onto my bedside table. I always keep two knives at my bedside and two in my suit at night. I slip into bed and my dogs cuddle up beside me. I have to find a way to prove myself to my uncle. I just have to.

Find Chapter Three in our Spring Zine March 2022

THE FLAME OF MARS

An excerpt by Florence



Chapter One

Long ago, when the planets were at war and missiles screamed through the roiling mass of space, a child was born. She had skin like newly cooled glass. Smooth, translucent and glowing with tendrils of fire filled veins. The first female of the legacy of Aguya was born. They were the flame sisters, eight women with the power of the inferno pulsing through their veins.

Gifted by fate to be the bringers of peace, they held the powers they needed to subdue the war and bring silence in a time of noise. They became the leaders of the solar system and figures of strength and beauty to all. Now, unbeknownst to them they had eight brothers who were forgotten at their birth, outshone by their elder sisters, and forced to take the backseat.

A terrible bitterness grew within them till they acquired powers of their own, dark powers that rivaled those of the Aguya. They became the first of the Tumas, a brotherhood of darkling powers, the bringers of hate and pain. A new war waged, more terrible than the first filled with blood, hate, pain and fire. In the heat of the battle all of the Aguya and Tumas were killed, and their legacy forgotten.

Evanna

She stood on the hill overlooking the Mars desert, particles of sand scratching at her skin in the whipping wind. Her pale eyes narrowed, searching. The miles and miles of sand, the colour of dried blood stretched to the edge of the horizon, marking her as a speck in a innumerable sea of enemies. She grunted and adjusted her rifle, squinting hard. Far off there was a group of black shapes moving quickly along the sand. In one swift, well practiced movement she dropped to the sand, raised her rifle's rig to her eye and aimed. A bang echoed in the howling gale and she watched with a smug grin as one of the snipers fell and the others ran around in disarray. Evanna picked them off one by one, bored by the time they all lay dead, adding to the desert's crimson stain. Her eyes swept over the rusty landscape searching for any more black shapes but none appeared.

Satisfied, Evanna turned her back and headed in the direction of her podship. A bang went off.

Before she could even register where it came from, a burning pain in her stomach sent her to my knees with a gasp. Blood began to seep through her gown in a deadly red stain and she grimaced, clutching blindly for her gun. This was where it ended. The edges of her vision began to blur and in her panic she remembered something that she never should have forgotten.

She woke up buried up to her neck in red sand, she blinked once. Twice. Then rolled over to inspect her bloody side. Nothing. She sat up, her mind spinning in dizzying pirouettes. The wind died down and the desert was silent, her rasping breath the only noise in the hollow void. she flipped onto her back and memories flooded the corners of her consciousness and crammed into her mind. They spilled out her nose and ears with the screams of battle, draining into the sand and making her head pound. She knew who she was, She knew where she was from, and she knew what was coming.

Find the next excerpt from 'The Flame of Mars' in our
Spring Zine: March 2022

POLLY THE POSSUM

A Comedy

By Jakob

It was 1945. World War II was coming to a close. Or so everyone thought. For you see, despite the fall of both Germany and Japan a new foe had emerged at the last second.

Polly the Possum. Now Polly was quite mad. She had two holes she lived in. One had been trampled by the Allies, and one had been trampled by the Axis. So she was quite mad.

"This society..." she began, talking to nobody who cared. There was a hare, but he had died from getting shot by the mob after losing a race to a turtle. "Is broken," she continued, "Valuing things such as winning a war over keeping poor little possum holes safe."

"That is it!" she shouted suddenly. "I am fed up. ALL my life, I work hard, slowly building a grand little hole and it is destroyed in seconds by careless, hairless apes! You know what, ape-boy?" She shouted at a farmer who'd walked into the shed she was holding her speech in, "I am starting a war on all your ape boy crap! So buckle your keister, sonny jim jams, because you are going for a ride to ka-pow town and my fists are gonna git you a one-way ticket!"

"Aww, what a cute little possum," the farmer said, kneeling down, "I bet my son would love to have you as a pet. He loves possums."

"Your son is a deranged psychopath with need of some sort of institution to beat sense into his stir-fried brain." Polly stated flatly, and the dead hare rotted extra to emphasize the sheer awesomeness of the burn Polly had just given the farmer.

"Gee, you sure are squeaking a lot," the farmer remarked. "Maybe you're hungry?"

"Yes!" Polly shouted, "Hungry for vengeance! Hungry for blood! The great possum empire shall rise again! And this time... It shall spread for more than just two blocks of Oak Bay!"

And with that, Polly scratched the farmer. Blood spurted out of his chest, and he spoke, "Well, lookit dat. Guess I'm bleeding." Shrugging, he walked out of the shed and promptly fell over.

Polly, running out of the shed, saw a tractor and began to drive it. She crashed into another shed and fell out of the tractor, dizzy.

“Who the hell has two sheds?” She shouted into the stratosphere.

Polly collapsed on the ground. She landed on a button. Suddenly, the countryside exploded. Polly gasped, seeing that it was a mine activator. “Hahahahahaha, take that, hairless apes!” Polly shouted.

Dead bodies littered the French countryside. Polly sprinted through the countryside, triumphant. However, she gasped as she saw several dead bodies of possums, and blown up possum holes that were far too large.

Weeping, Polly spoke the greatest speech ever uttered by any creature- hairless ape or possum.

“I have become that which I sought to destroy. That which has no regard for the daily lives of possums. Instead focused on their own misguided missions, one must consider the possum. Or even the lice. Intelligent creatures, both of them. But yet we shave lice out of our hair, when many novelists were secretly lice in disguise. One doesn’t know this, but the lord of the flies was originally the lord of the lices, but the title was changed after negative reaction from the Austral theflashian fly population at lack of representation in modern media. I suppose one must consider the fly, swatted at, forgotten about, and-”

“Hey, there’s a possum, let’s go kick it!” several children shouted and began kicking Polly. They eventually turned Polly into a very nice hat which became quite popular in Belgium and France

“Possum’s in this season, dahling,” the fashion gurus would say as they curtsied around.

And all Polly could do was wait. For one day the gates of hell would open, and Polly would lead an army of the undead to kill us all.

Which is why we must all join the cult of Polly. All of us.

Even you...







The Sirens Sing for Odysseus

BY CAMERON

Chapter Three

I sprang out of bed, throwing on my binder and glasses and riffling through my pockets for the rock. When my fingers touched the stone, I seized it and immediately dropped it on the floor in surprise with a loud thud. Snatching it up, I made sure Grandad wasn't coming upstairs to check out the noise, then shook my head in disbelief.

The pebble was warm! Like a human, and not like the average river rock. Mind you, it was summer, and the rock looked like basalt, which was known for its heat-retaining properties. In fact, that's why the stones used in hot stone massages are often basalt. Did you know- Oh, no! I'm getting off topic again, there's no time for that! Back to the matter at hand.

So, it could just have been exposed to sun and then stuck in my hot coat pocket for the whole day, but- Wait! I never went outside! I stayed in to play piano and read! "This rock is suspicious," I mumbled. "Now let's see what you're hiding, you secretive little-"

"Alright, alright! You've caught me!" A boy-shaped mist that was quickly solidifying into an ordinary boy, flew from the rock and I nearly fainted.

"What the- wha- who are you?" I said, tripping over my feet as I backed into the corner.

"I'm Devon! Your local spectre, at your service! It's delightful to meet you." He seized my hand and shook it with vigor, his golden curls bouncing up and down. Oddly enough, his hand was warm; not at all like the stereotypical ghost. The words 'grey' and 'cold' didn't even seem to be part of his vocabulary.

"Pleased to meet you too, er- Devon. How did you die? You don't seem to have any wounds, just- many, many freckles. Were you poisoned, perhaps?"

He squinted at me, his raised eyebrow just visible over the thick lens of his glasses. "Well that's a bit rude, isn't it? You wouldn't ask a lady how old she is, so you shouldn't ask a ghost how he died."

I shifted my feet around. This was not going well. "Forgive me. I tend to blurt things out on occasion. Erm- let's start at the beginning, shall we? Can you describe yourself to me, maybe? Like- I know what you look like, but I don't know when you were born, where you go- er, went- to school. You know. That kind of thing."

Devon smiled. "Alright! My name is Devon, but I've told you that already, so, well, I was born in 1837. I went to Stocksburg, but I ended up killed in the fire - there I told you how I died," he sighed and rubbed his brow.

I made a dismissive gesture. "Don't worry about it! Besides, I forget most things people tell me."

The ghost quickly turned, looking back at me with the saddest eyes I had ever seen. They were the same blue of the sky right before it's covered by rain clouds, like he was trying to hold back the downpour. "Does that mean you'll forget me?"

I shrugged. "Likely not. I mean, it's not every day you meet a ghost."

He extended his pinkie towards me. "Promise?"

I scratched my neck, trying to get the words, "I can't" out of my mouth, but they wouldn't come. He looked so sad, his solitary finger just hanging there by itself.

"I promise." I linked my pinkie with his, pumping it up and down a few times for good measure and he beamed back at me. Before I knew what was happening, he had me wrapped up in an embrace. Usually, hugs felt unnatural to me, but this was different. I threw my arms around him and hugged him back. He giggled and released me.

Oh. Maybe he didn't like that. Maybe I did something wrong. That- that's- they all giggle like that, they all do that little thing, but they don't think you're funny, they never think you're funny, stupid Mordecai, thought it was different-

"Are we friends now?"

I squinted at him. "So you're not upset?"

"No, no, of course not! Why would I be?" he said, laughing slightly.

"Oh. Well then, I suppose we are."

The two of us stood there for a moment; me unsure of how to proceed and him practically vibrating with joy.

"So, er-" I started, then quickly stopped, instead opting to gently wrap my arms around him again. Devon seemed to be rather fond of hugs, and he gave even more proof to this theory as he squeezed me back, even lifting me up a little. It was curious how ghosts were portrayed in the media as transparent, sad shells of humans, when this one was so bright and cheerful. Yet another example of what is fundamentally wrong with society.

"Thank you. Truly. You have no idea how long it's been since I've touched another person."

I grinned, laughing slightly. "Oh, I know a thing or two about not touching people."

"You're a ghost too? That's so c-"

Quickly shaking my head, I plopped myself down on the mattress. "No, no. Just don't like it. Touching and all that." I shuddered at the thought.

A concerned expression played across Devon's face as he sat down next to me. "Wait, did you not like the hug? I'm sorry, I won't do it again."

"No, it's alright, the hug was actually really nice. From you, though. With other people, it's less nice."

The ghost looked at me, tilting his head slightly like a puppy. "Why?"

Outside, I simply stood and stared, but on the inside, there was a panic. The best way I could think to describe it was that a military commander had taken residence in my brain and was determined to achieve his goal at all costs: avoid answering the question. Engage deflection tactics! Everyone to your positions, go, go, go! Now, fire subject change at will!

"Dogs are the worst."

Devon glanced around at me, raising his eyebrow. "What?"

"Well, just, cats are better, obviously."

He gasped, quickly rushing to argue. "They are not!"

"Are too!"

"Are not!"

Just then, I heard my grandad's footsteps creaking up the stairs. Picking Devon up, I threw him down on the mattress and flung the covers up and over his face, taking my glasses off and sliding into bed beside him.

"What're you doing-"

"Shh! Don't make a sound!" He nodded and fell silent. I rolled over, closing my eyes and pretending to be asleep. The door creaked open, and my grandad let out a short 'aw' before closing the door behind him, careful not to disturb me.

I breathed a sigh of relief and pulled the covers off of Devon's face, only to find him snoring peacefully. Now it was my turn to 'aw'. Plucking his glasses off of his face, I set them down on the nightstand next to my own. I fluffed his curly hair and rolled closer to him, exhausted by the excitement and sudden change in routine of the last few days. It had to be very far past my usual bedtime, and change was uncomfortable for me. So, I laid back for real this time, smiling as I did.

The voices who liked to keep me up late were rather quiet today, and understandably so. Likely in shock after having met a real ghost.

I was fine with that. I didn't need them. They were troublemakers. Nobody likes troublemakers, they spoil the fun.

But I was having some thoughts of my own for once, not simply those anxious and depressed whispers that never seemed to stop. No, these thoughts were happy, and contained the prospect of a concept previously foreign to me: friendship.

As I turned my head to look at the sleeping boy next to me, I couldn't help but smile. All the children at school, with their 'inside jokes' and football games and fun; all those toothy, grinning faces, had always felt like some kind of elite club. One that I couldn't possibly comprehend, let alone join. And I accepted that, telling myself I was fine without them. I did other things. Deep inside though, (and I knew this, I just ignored it) I craved the kind of affection that society decided I wasn't deserving of, but society had decided it, and who would everyone else be to disobey society?

Devon, though, felt different. I knew he was different. And I also knew that no matter how much I wished for it, I could never be part of that elite club.

So maybe we should form our own?

It was this last thought that finally settled my brain to 'sleep mode' and I sighed with relief, shutting my eyes.

Suddenly, I jolted up. "Crap, I'm still wearing my binder!" I whispered aloud as I got up to take it off. I had never gone to sleep while binding before, and I never would. I liked my ribcage to be in one piece, thank you very much!

Finally at peace, with no more sore chest and no more wandering thoughts, I laid back and accepted the rest with open arms.

Find Chapter Four in our Spring Zine March 2022



JUST BY BEING, WE GIVE OFF LIGHT.

- Kira



THE BASEMENT

BY MAISHA

I don't remember much from *before*.

Well, that statement isn't entirely accurate. It's what I say to people, when they ask. It's what I tell myself, over and over. The only way to make sense of it is to pretend that I don't remember it.

But I do remember it. I remember myself, Cady, wearing a pink dress. The pink dress was mine. It was a part of me. I don't think I wore anything else. I don't think I had anything else to wear. Cady-in-the-pink-dress. That was me.

I remember three other girls. Jemi. Aida. Bia.

Thinking those names makes me break out in a cold sweat. *Jemi, Aida, Bia. Jemi, Aida, Bia.*

I haven't thought about them this much in a long time.

I don't think I want to.

Yes I do.

Jemi. I'll just think about Jemi. She was the redhead. I think she was the second oldest, after me. I think--no, I *know*--that we were friends. More so than I was with the others. I wasn't having to care for her the same way, so we were friends instead.



Her hair was red. And it curled. She had freckles.

I'm starting to shake. I should stop.

I'm not going to stop.

She had freckles and a pleasant, pudgy face. Her hair was curly, but it was never combed, so it sat in one big matt.

Aida was next.

I don't know why I'm thinking about this. I don't know why I'm thinking about *before*.

Aida was next.

She was younger. She had dark hair and she was tiny. She was a good girl. She helped care for Bia. Her real name was Eliza, but we called her Aida. I don't know why.

Bia was the baby. She toddled around and played. Aida was good at minding her.

Jemi and Aida and Bia are gone now. I don't think about them a lot.

It makes me feel odd.

Anyway. I've got a scar, running over my left shoulder blade. I don't know where it came from. There's a lot of things I don't know.

Like my name. They keep on telling me my name is not Cady. It's Anna.

My name isn't Anna. It's Cady. That's who I was. You can't just change it.

I was Cady-in-the-pink dress.

I think I was ten when I lost them.

Maybe I was older.

I really don't know anything.

It was after we'd eaten. I heard noises on the top floor. Shouting. We didn't hear that often, but when we did, it was never good. The girls and I sat on the last step of the basement staircase. I put my arms around Jemi and Aida. Bia was on my lap. The door opened--

I'm going to throw up.

No. I won't.

The door opened and light fell over us.

I don't want to finish this story.

There were voices. Three of them.

They came down the steps.

They grabbed us by the arms.

I'm vomiting.

They told us that we were safe.

What does safe mean?

They dragged us out of the basement. I didn't even know it was called a basement.

I didn't know that the rest of the world existed.

They took Jemi and Aida and Bia.

They separated us.

I don't know who I am anymore.

I don't understand anything.

They use the word 'kidnapped'.

What does that mean?

They keep calling me Anna.

My name is Cady.

The Keeper called me Cady.

That is my name.

What is jail?

They say that The Keeper has gone to jail.

I'm living with somebody called my mother.

I don't know what a mother is.

I don't know what police are either.

That's what 'rescued' me.

What's a rescue?

I want to go back to my world.

Back to the basement.

The Mother says that it's something called a 'trauma response', when I make my sentences so short.

Sometimes short sentences is all I can do.

The Mother is trying to explain what happened to me.

I don't understand anything.

I am going to explode.

I didn't know that anything else existed besides the basement and The Keeper.

I want to go back to before.

I want to go back to the basement.



EVEREMBER

BY NIKOLAI

FANTASY WORLD DESCRIPTION: MYSTIC VALE PARADISE

Population: somewhere between fifty and two hundred. No one ever bothers to count for fear of being smacked by a very very old and angry retired hero of some sort. Besides, there are too many travellers and warbands to know who actually lives here.

* * *

Firstly, in naming a place like this you must have one vowel that is repeated constantly. Otherwise, a paradise-like this won't have that same feel that an adventurers retirement home has. Secondly, this is a fantastical place, it is likely it will have attracted weird people who might have been a mighty wizard or great hero, but chose eating goat yogurt and sitting cross-legged on a mountainside instead. Also, dragons.

This is a place of unnegotiable violence, the old men here are all about zen and inner peace, songs, dances, and even poetry. There is no hope for goblins to raid here, orcs, humans, elves, dwarves, or any other sort of humanoid either. Half the population is retired barbarians or bards. (Bards can be lethal with battle lutes or dagger flutes, be creative about what they bear.) It can be a safe haven for adventurers too, from hordes, winter or a natural disaster.

The expanse of ground that spreads out in front of you is surrounding a river, which leaps from bank to bank, splashing water over the farming area, as a natural watering can.



This seems to be where a crazy god had taken a knife to the ground. The jagged ravine, cut through the wilderness wildly, making a divide between rocky giants of mountains and small hills. These nearby mountains were told in legend to be ancient, petrified Dragons and told off by their inhabitants as 'not living up to their name,' which is Flamemaw. The mountains were really just rocky hills on one side but dropped steeply down into the crevasse on the other.

In the valley, the houses were sparse and well-spaced out. Just enough that if someone did something their neighbour didn't like, they would be far enough away on their porch that the offending neighbor would be able to hear that someone yelling, but not make out the words.

And then the offending neighbour would yell incomprehensibly back. This was probably due to some conflict or other that would lead to the destruction of both neighbours' houses, having them moved further away from each other. This was adopted as mandatory by whoever was the keeper in the odd place.

* * *

The keeper of the odd place was Lord Humphrey, a rebel-elf-knight-mage-king, or something. He couldn't seem to make heads or tails of his appearance, which to most others looked like he was wearing a giant purple grapefruit. He had frills around his collar and on the tops of his long, pointed lionskin boots. When he moved, the folds of endless fabric shifted so that he looked suddenly to be wearing his clothes backward.

Lord Humphrey was in a state, and he was going to have fun with it. He hadn't had much time to order the underlings about in days, and that was going to change.

"A quest!" shouted the lord. He was sitting in meditation with a dozen monks, all wearing hoods of dark ebony-colored material.

One was brave enough to answer. "Yes sir," they said quietly, non-committal.

Lord Humphrey ordered the bravest adventurers in all the valley to be brought to him in his private secure chambers. This happened within a minute, and when the monks questioned him on the subject of the quest he told them to mind their own business. He thought it was rather wonderful how one's mood dictated their schedule.

The bravest turned out to be two rather disheveled men with big sticks, along with an elderly woman and her goat "for the yogurt". They introduced themselves as "oh, you know, people", and said the sticks were rare "humvpajdnoan" wood from the rare jungles somewhere, for medicinal purposes only.

The old woman was a professional trainer of yogurt goats.

"But what of the fighter?" cried the Lord. "You can't defend yourself without one!"

The old woman barked a laugh and said, "What do you think I train? That goat is our fighter!"

"But what if a dragon attacks you? There have been rumors of them in the hills!"

"I can fight too, you know. I and my goat were more than enough for the old red dragon of Laorsoul." The old woman seemed to have had to defend this subject all too much.

"Well, alright," said Lord Humphrey, after a pause. "Your quest is thus: Go to the far port of Loarfields. They bring in all kinds of food from all over the world there, and plenty of rich merchants there that bring in all foods and spices, and with them crooks. Very untrustworthy they are and dealing with them would be a brave act for anyone."

"You want us to protect those merchants to earn allies, right?" said the man with the larger piece of wood.

"Not at all, I want a bagel."

There was some confusion. So the Lord said he wanted the very best bagel, and he wanted it before tea time, all the way from whatever jungles those humvpajdnoan sticks were from, because all heroes want a challenge. And to give it incentive he told them otherwise they would be banished from the valley.

* * *

Hidden civilizations and safe holds hold interesting inhabitants.



FEMINIST BOOK RECOMMENDATIONS

BY KAHLAN

Sci-Fi & Fantasy

- Spin The Dawn
by Elizabeth Lim
- Iron Widow
by Xiran Jay Zhao

Zombies

- Girls Save the
World in This One
by Ash Parsons
- Dread Nation
by Justina Ireland

Middle Grade

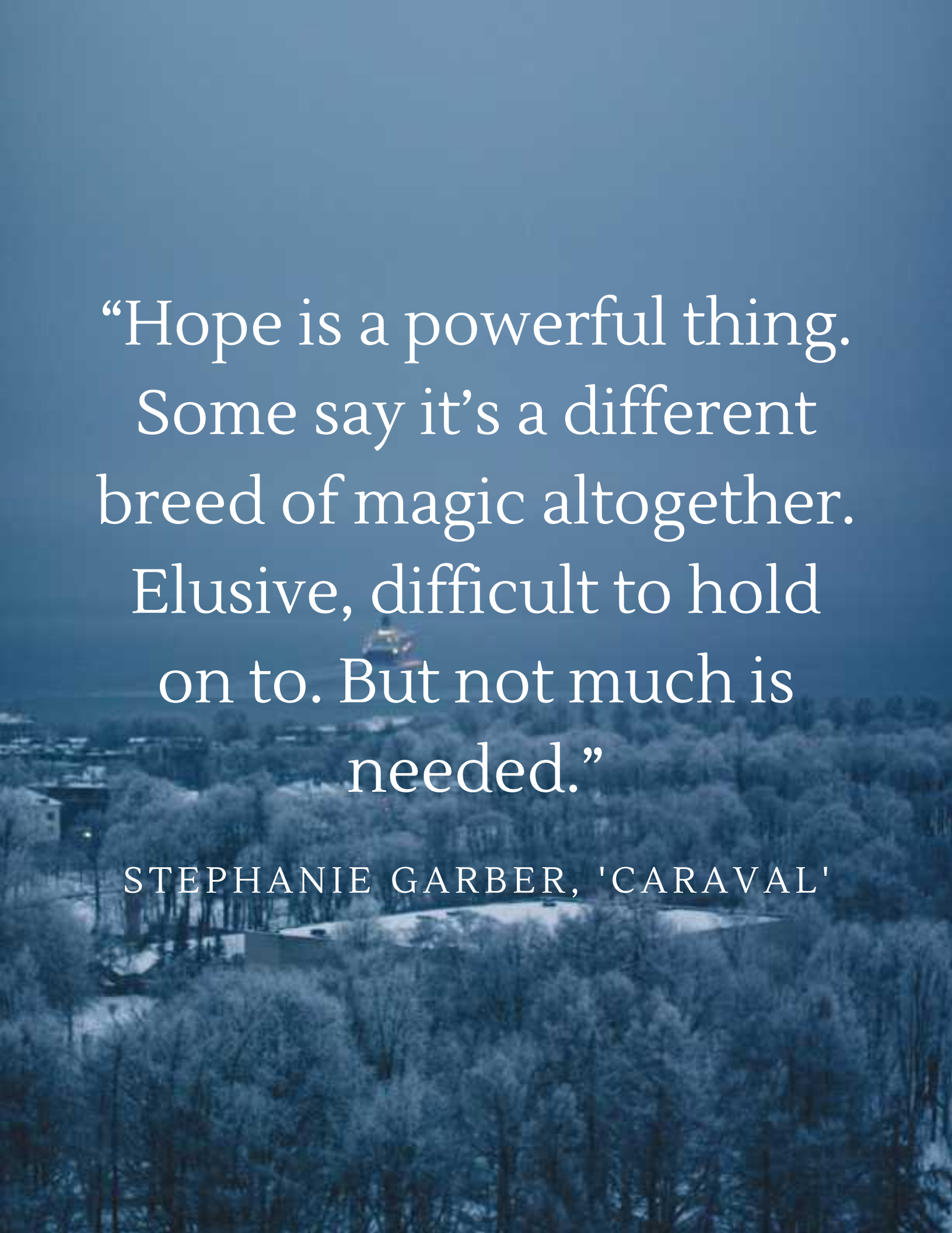
- The Evolution of
Calpurnia Tate
by Jacqueline Kelly
- Dress Coded
by Carrie
Firestone
- Go With the Flow
by Lily Williams &
Karen
Schneemann
- Maybe he Just
Likes You
by Barbara Dee

Historical Fiction

- Blood Water
Paint
by Joy
McCullough
- Walk On Earth a
Stranger
by Rae Carson

Contemporary

- Speak
by Laurie Halse
Anderson
- Rules For Being a
Girl
by Candace
Bushnell & Katie
Cotugno
- Six Angry Girls
by Adrienne
Kisner

An aerial photograph of a dense forest covered in a thick layer of snow. In the middle ground, a small, dark building is visible, and further back, a tall, illuminated tower or lighthouse stands out against the pale sky. The overall scene is quiet and wintry.

“Hope is a powerful thing.
Some say it’s a different
breed of magic altogether.
Elusive, difficult to hold
on to. But not much is
needed.”

STEPHANIE GARBER, 'CARAVAL'

ON STIGMA

BY KIRA

Stigma: a mark of disgrace associated with a particular circumstance, quality, or person.

Stigma: a set of negative and often unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something.

Stigma: an association of disgrace or public disapproval with something, such as an action or condition.

Whether you know it or not, stigma affects you. It's impossible to escape from— it's everywhere from housing to mental health to gender and racial inequality. And, like it or not, it's a part of everyday life.

You probably know about stigma on one level or another. There are posters hanging on school walls that say, "De-stigmatize mental illness!" and ads from the government trying to open your eyes to the reality of substance abuse. Perhaps you've read a news article about stigma against people of colour. Regardless of where you've seen it, or in what context, it's clear that stigma is a major issue that society has yet to solve. Although there are efforts to reduce it, it feels as if nothing much has changed— and nothing will, not if we stay on this path.

I recently did a deep dive into affordable housing in B.C. Together with three others, I looked for as much information as possible, from as many sources as possible. When we took all of our research and typed it out in one document, it didn't take long to realize where the root of the problem is. The cause of affordable housing isn't that there aren't enough homes- though that's true- or that there's no rent cap. Rather, the problem lies in the archaic systems that are still in place today, and our complete lack of willingness to do anything about it.

So what is stigma, really? The way I see it, it's far more than just one's feelings about a matter. Rather, it's the sum of the beliefs said to be acceptable by society, the story that lies in the subtext of all the media we're fed every moment

of every day. How many times have we watched others turn away from those without a home? How many times have we done it ourselves, because there seems to be no other option? Stigma lies in our stories about others and the way we see them. Stigma is what we believe the “right life” and “right person” look like.

Stigma is rarely caused by just one thing. More often, it has many components that serve as a system to keep it in place. But the more I looked into these problems, the clearer the location those pieces come from is. I like to call it the big four: racism, sexism, classism and homophobia. And where do those things come from, you might ask? I believe these come from something innately human— our desire to be better than those around us, or, in other words— our hunger for others to be less.

Think about it: where do the four come from, except from the belief that others are less? It's never truly justifiable, nor is it logical in any sense of the word. Because we so badly want to be better than those around us, we've convinced ourselves of these things. And because humanity has used them as the building blocks of society, it's very, very difficult to alter what we have now.

How, then, do we change? To start, let's take a long look at the pain this stigma causes. Look at the people on the streets, those on the verge of mental breakdowns, those being told that they're weak for needing what they do— any and all of the people who are pushed to the side because we've lost faith in them, or they in us.

Now, look away. Look at the world we've built, the good we've done for millions of people and think about the good we could do for all the rest. We're a part of a society that can provide, can protect. Why aren't we doing these things? Think about that for a while. Once you've done that, it's time to start a conversation.

It won't be easy, far from it. Most people won't really know what to say, or they won't want to say anything. You yourself might feel ashamed, or sad, or angry. But feeling those things- feeling at all- means you understand that something must be done. Only once we understand that can there be any change.

Our understanding must become fuel for this change. Talk with as many people as you can about the things you've learned. Ask questions, look deeper than what's on the surface. Educating yourself and others is the first step to any change, on any level.

Empathy, too, is an innately human trait. When we look at others, we're quite skilled at stepping inside their shoes. Through learning about stigma and the pain it causes, we begin to empathize with those it affects most. We don't like to see each other in pain. No matter how much we want to be better than others, no matter how much we desire to lead, to survive— when faced with the truth, almost anyone can see that it's not “their problem,” but “our problem”.

Once the people see a problem in truth, the governments can start making change. They're most often run for the people, after all. If society as a whole starts saying that something must be done, then those in power will begin to listen. Legislature can change, funding can be used, organizations can begin to expand their reach. Suddenly, there are safety nets to fall into. Suddenly, we are turning to new, better ways of living. Suddenly, we've changed the centuries-long narrative. Changed it to one where everyone is seen as nothing less than human.

And that is something I long for more than anything else; understanding into love, into change.



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Opportunity!
Ages 13-18

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Submit your piece of writing by emailing info@storystudio.ca by
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