



# mermaids monthly

Issue #6 - June 2021

Brandon O'Brien  
David Mohan  
Devin Miller  
Elizabeth Burch-Hudson  
Emily Deibert  
Inkshark  
Jennifer Lee Rossman  
Jordan Kurella  
Kala Tye  
Mimi Silverstein  
Rod M. Santos  
Sara Eileen Hames  
Sarah Peploe  
Seanan McGuire  
Tamara Jerée



# mermaids monthly

a magazine about mermaid stuff. that's it. that's the shell.

Mermaids Monthly, P.O. Box 748, 9245 State Route 22, Hillsdale, NY, 12529

mermaidsmonthly.com ☞ mermaidsmonthly@gmail.com

Editor and Publisher - Julia Rios  
Assistant Editor - Ashley Deng  
Designer and Publisher - Meg Frank  
Logistics Wizard - Lis Hulin Wheeler

Mermaids Monthly is a magazine all about mermaids. Happy mermaids, murderous mermaids; mermaids, merdudes, mermxs – maybe even a few highly confused manatees. Any cool aquatic chimeras that you could ever possibly think of with any and every fin color and combination. To subscribe, visit [mermaidsmonthly.com](http://mermaidsmonthly.com).

Love is love is love is love and wisdom all surface in these pages, it arrives in all different shapes along with agency, eagerness, and sizes. This month you'll find and humor. eighteen looks of love in several Every contributor (authors, shades we hope delight you: artists, editors, and etc) who love of self, love of others, love worked on this issue is queer! in longing, and love in leaving. Help us celebrate them loudly Acceptance, understanding, and with love. ❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️❤️🧜‍♀️



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# Proud of This Ship

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by Julia Rios

Happy Pride!

We're delighted to bring you a whole issue celebrating queer creators. Everyone on the Mermaids Monthly staff for 2021 is queer, so celebrating queer work, examining queer struggles, and creating space for queer stories that end happily are all things that matter a lot to us. We're also a staff of people with complex identities. We are neurodiverse, mixed race, and we have various issues with chronic pain and illness. All of these things exist simultaneously with our queerness. We wanted to present a sampling of work by creators, who, like us, come from a lot of different backgrounds. In this issue, you'll find trans and non-binary creators alongside cis ones, and works that explore experiences from lots of different parts of the LGBTQ+ spectrum. The issue includes work by disabled, neurodiverse, BIPOC, and non-US creators because queerness does not depend on geography, or existing in a vacuum. There are all kinds of ways to be queer, and if you are uncertain that your particular identity is valid, we want you to know that all kinds of swimmers are welcome in our waters.

We're also releasing this issue to everyone at the same time rather than our usual practice of sending it to our subscribers first. We chose to do this so that everyone would have the chance to read the issue during Pride month. However! We did send a special early bonus to our subscribers. It's a story by Jordan Kurella, and it goes really well as a companion piece with their essay. If you are reading this in June of 2021 and are not already a subscriber, you can get that story right away by signing up for our Patreon at <https://www.patreon.com/mermaidsmonthly> -- and, of course, if you don't have the cash to sign up now, you can wait and read that story in July!

Come, let's dive in and find some treasure!

--Julia Rios





Illustration by Mimi Silverstein



# La Voce to Me

---

by Jennifer Lee Rossman

It was never my movie  
She was never my princess  
The prince wouldn't love her unless she had working legs, and  
I didn't need a movie to tell me I was too disabled to be loved  
And anyway  
Belle had a nicer library

Grew up thinking mother knows best  
But Mom was a sea bitch  
And this girl who had everything, she wasn't a girl and she  
didn't have anything, and I ran away to be where the people  
were  
They taught me about this whole new world  
And that I can sing

And I cut off my hair  
And I dressed like a guy  
And all right maybe that's a different princess and a different  
movie altogether, but I wanted my reflection to show who I  
am inside  
I asked to go on T  
And that doesn't stand for thingamabob



I've never been happy before  
Never had the confidence to sing  
Went down a seashell size, no more monthly caviar giving  
me... what's that word again, oh, gender dysphoria  
But magic is a double edged spinning wheel  
It always comes with a price

My voice  
It wants my voice  
And I get it now, it's not that he couldn't love her without  
working legs, he couldn't love her until she loved herself,  
until she was happy like me  
Is this a nautilus shell at my neck?  
Or a poisoned Adam's apple growing?

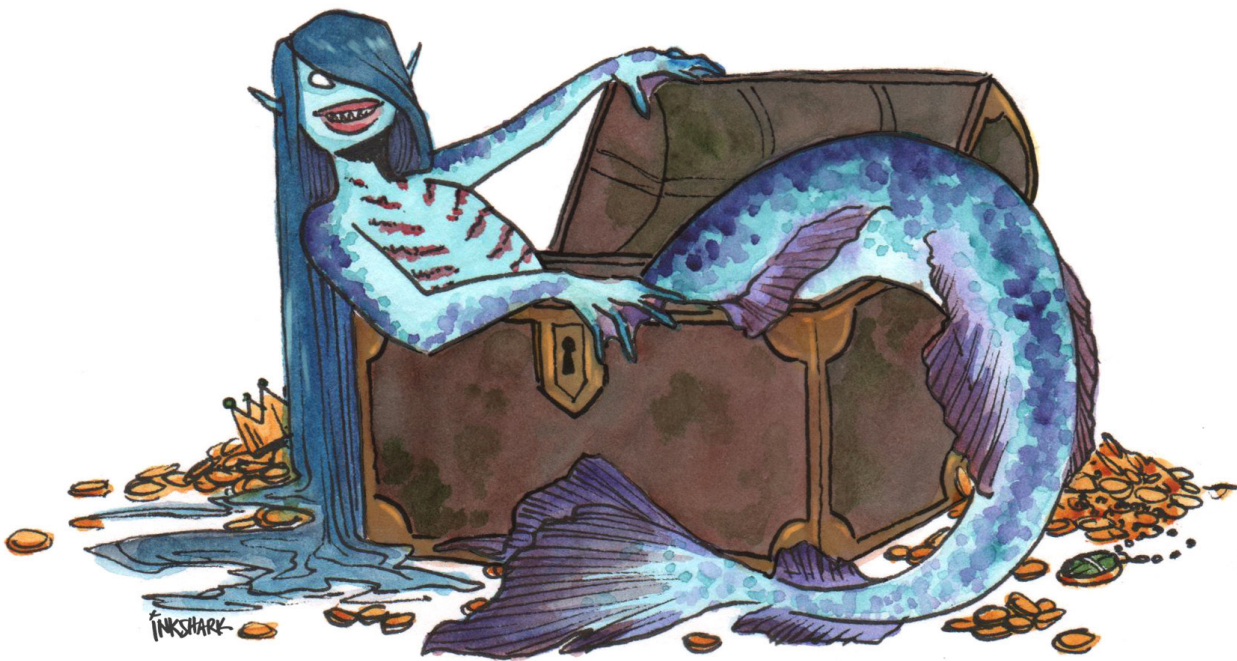


Illustration by Inkshark

# Not the Brightest Starfish in the Sea

---

by Rod M. Santos

The war was over, but one last duty darkened the thoughts of Sir Hector de la Torre. On the list of things the knight wanted to do, it ranked somewhere between kissing a vulture and headbutting a unicorn.

The final battle by the Río Suspirando had been weeks ago, but he still dreamt of fellow soldier and friend, Antonello, floating away on the roaring waters, eyes closed and body skewered with arrows. The man had been recently betrothed, and therein lay Hector's self-appointed burden: bearing the terrible news to a bride who would never be.

Antonello had said precious little about her, though Hector knew where to start looking. The tale went that the lovers met south of Artiles, where the Suspirando flowed by a rock cropping that resembled a fish doing a handstand.

*Or would that be a fin-stand?* Sir Hector wondered.

Travel had proved surprisingly pleasant: the road easy and the spring weather

mild. The river ran more calmly the farther south he went. Hector followed the waterway to an odd rock formation that, with intense squinting, appeared to be an upside-down fish. Or perhaps a lopsided pineapple. An argument could even be made for a portly minotaur.

He'd barely been there a few seconds when a large form, red and sparkling, burst from the water. Hector's hand flew to the hilt of his sword.

Water sluiced off the form's powerful muscles and iridescent scales, and when it shook itself, the sunlight turned the droplets into sprays of diamonds. Hector gasped.

*A mermaid!*

*No! A mer-man!*

Regardless of gender, the creature was unlike anything Hector could have imagined. Since childhood, he'd heard many tales of sirenas and tritones. He'd always pictured the merfolk's lower halves as resembling the dun and dull



silver of carps. How wrong he was! No flamenco dancer's dress was ever more vibrant than the merman's ruffled fins and tail. They glistened in passionate shades of orange and red, trimmed with a creamy white fringe speckled in black.

And the human half! The merman was so handsome he was beautiful. His sleek face tapered to an elegant chin, and his cheeks were bunched high by a beaming smile. His thick, dark hair shone like onyx with sapphire highlights.

There was one striking incongruity—his eyes. Though radiant, they held an odd... vacancy, like deep empty lakes longing for fish to play in them.

"Cheery greetings!" said the merman in a voice as rippling as his muscles.

Hector took a step back and exhaled, sensing this amazing creature was not capable of a harmful thought.

"Greetings, yes! I pray I have not disturbed you. I'm looking for a woman named Oninda."

The merman's jaw dropped. "My name is Oninda, too! Oh, please let me know if you find her! I've never met anyone with my name before. I mean besides myself!"

Thoughts tumbled in Hector's mind. Were the gods playing some jest? "You... you wouldn't, by chance, know a human

by the name of Antonello?"

"I wouldn't? But I do! And not by chance, but fate." The merman—Oninda—clasped his hands. "He is my betrothed, and I love him more than clams." His vacant gaze turned dreamy. "He bid me to return here each day that I might find him waiting, and we would never be parted again."

Hector tried to blink the world into some sense of alignment. He was unsure which half of this revelation surprised him more, the "mer-" or the "-man." Antonello had given no inkling his proclivities leant toward...the piscine. Clearly, his references to his betrothed as "a magical creature" had not been hyperbole.

Oninda returned Hector's blinks, though he did so in slow motion. A colorful yellow flower fell from a nearby tree, but before it could touch the surface of the river, the merman snatched it and shoved it into his mouth. He blinked some more, alternating with chews as if doing both simultaneously was too taxing.

Hector shook his head. As the initial shock of the situation wore off, he recalled his purpose.

"My name is Sir Hector de la Torre. I fear I have heartbreaking news." He steeled himself. He had endured dreadful things during the war, but suffering pain was not the same as delivering it.

“Yes?” Oninda asked, his smile not fading in the least.

“I fought in the army with your betrothed—”

Oninda spat out chewed-up petals. “Oh, that is terrible news! What were you two fighting about? Was it his tiny beard? He’s very sensitive about it, as I guess you found out.”

Hector shook his head. “Uh, no. That is to say, I fought alongside your betrothed. There is no way for me to couch the sad tidings, so I’ll speak it plain. Antonello has fallen in battle.”

Oninda nodded. And waited. His eyes remained placid, fathomless, and as Hector stared into them, he swore he could hear the ocean.

“Um, perhaps I should repeat myself. He fell in combat, fighting bravely to the last.”

“And did you help him get back up?” Oninda asked.

“What?”

“After he fell. Or were you still mad because of your fight? He can be quite clumsy, but clever, too. Bright as a starfish!”

Hector was unsure what was so bright

about starfish. All they did was laze the whole day away on the beach, which now that he thought about it was actually solid proof of intelligence.

The merman propped his elbows on the shore, his chin resting heavily in his hands. “I do so miss his sunny smile. And bulging muscles. And you should see his...but no, I’m sure that’s for my eyes only.” His sigh was a wistful breeze.

Whatever language barrier existed between them was starting to unsettle Hector. “Oninda, you don’t understand. Antonello has passed on. Gone to a better place.”

The merman scoffed. “Oh, my little butt-dimples wouldn’t leave without me.”

“No, he’s...he’s bit the dust—”

“Wow, he must have been hungry!”

“—put on a wooden overcoat,—”

“Splinters, ouch!”

“—he’s kicked the bucket!”

“What’s a bucket?”

“He’s sleeping with the fi—” Hector clapped a hand over his mouth, grateful he stopped himself in time.

This was more fatiguing than any battle



he'd fought in. He took a steady breath, then ventured forth once more. "He's...he's gone to meet his maker."

"His dad? He told me his dad was pushing daisies—"

"Yes!" Hector shouted victoriously.

"—which is quite an odd hobby even if you like gardening."

Hector moaned. He had never realized someone could be immune to euphemisms. He stepped forward and knelt so that he and the merman were eye to eye. "Antonello is dead. I saw his body, poked through with arrows, floating down the river. I am so very sorry."

Oninda stared at him, the silence stretching as long as the river itself. As Hector watched, the merman's smile started to melt, like snow under a merciless sun.

The merman glanced all around as if beset by invisible wasps. Or perhaps he just couldn't look at the face of the one who'd brought the worst news possible in the world.

Hector's heart welled in sympathy, and he felt tears come to his eyes.

The merman burst out laughing.

"You almost had me," Oninda said, then

splashed water playfully at Hector. "But if my love is dead, then who is that coming down the river?" He pointed.

Hector stood and squinted. He could just make out someone on a makeshift raft, someone who indeed looked like Antonello. Oninda vanished into the water, then appeared a distance away, ruby scales flashing as he skimmed upstream with powerful swishes of his tail. When he reached Antonello, he leapt into his arms sending them both into the waters with a loud ker-plash!

Hector waited ashore, rooted by disbelief. Had Oninda's denial of reality resurrected the dead? Or rather, had it been the merman's faith?

The merman eventually returned to the riverbed, Antonello clinging to his back in a tight embrace.

"But you died!" Hector shouted.

Antonello grinned. "A ruse is all. I'm sorry I had no time to tell you, but it came to me at the last instant, and by then, the fighting had started."

Hector was unconvinced. "You were sprouting arrows!"

"They were my own. I'd stuck them through my clothing and clenched more under my armpits. Then I jumped into the river and floated away. You see, in the

midst of all those ringing swords and roaring soldiers, I realized this was all rather silly, and that Oninda was the most important thing to me in the world. It was a sign from the gods that the fighting had taken me to the very river he called home. Please don't judge me a coward. I merely obeyed what my heart commanded."

A new silence fell. Hector pondered the happenings while the other two hugged, their foreheads pressed together as if they would never part again. Just as Antonello had promised Oninda.

"If...I must judge, then I judge you wise," Hector finally said. "When my life at last approaches its end, I would hope to look back and find I opted for love whenever the choice was mine. You pursued your own happy ending and caught it. Bright as a starfish, indeed."

Antonello turned to him and blushed. With a sly wink, he replied, "All I know is I had to get out of that battle alive. I felt sorry for the poor wretch who tried to tell my beloved I was dead!"

Illustration by Mimi Silverstein





# Shoretune

---

by Brandon O'Brien

they never used to mention this  
in them children's stories.  
they never tell me that  
on the edge of everything I would find you,  
your hair a sunrise of headstrong strands like mine,  
your skin a homely shade of earth like mine,  
they never say sirens come in baritone.

I used to watch your whole band,  
each body of this choir emerge from froth  
and take the quiet deadly serious:  
who would tap stones to keep time,  
and whose voice would keep warm with whispers  
of daring daydreams about us dry boys,  
and the aging chorister and his ragged scales  
whose voice could make starlight dim in jealousy

and you, voix de l'eau, a round obsidian  
skipping against the lake in my chest.  
they never tell me sirens does sing calypso,

bitter calypso about the colour of the water and  
eager calypso about a fisherman's soft lips and  
even some songs about me,  
crouched behind a palm to hear, a confidential audience,  
learning the deep's secrets, and seeking to go deeper  
about you, about your lyrics and the mouth  
that made them, about resting my ear  
against the centre of you and hearing  
what the ocean has to share.  
I wish someone did mention this sooner.

# At the Mouth of the Sea

---

By Tamara Jerée

*Content Note: This story contains a brief mention of blood.*

They do not call themselves mermaids, but that is what we call them. I hope the one I've fallen in love with will stay even though I know she won't. None of them ever do.

They arrive yearly on the way to their pilgrimage sites, and we know they've come by the way the sea beneath our small fishing boats vibrates with song. This is the first year I've been old enough to join the secretive courtship ritual. The village elders allow us girls to do this before we come of age, secure in the knowledge that mersong has never lured a girl away, that, ultimately, young mermaids visit our beach out of curiosity and owe devotion only to the spirit of the sea.

No mermaid has ever visited our shores twice, but that doesn't dim the hope in the older girls' eyes as we stand along the beach, waiting. Until they come of age, many will visit the beach hoping to see their beloved again, only to fall for the charm of another. We are all sick for their

affection: the taste of the salt on their lips, their rainbow slicks of hair, the thrill of kissing someone with so many rows of sharp teeth.

Our mothers understand the call to the sea because they have felt it themselves, never stop feeling it. Before we go to meet the mermaids for the first time, our mothers tell us stories of their lost beloveds and caress our hair and give us sad smiles even as they wish us happiness.



The first thing Aaeyeli does is teach me how to sing her name. I am shy about it. I have a poor singing voice. I tell her this. She kisses me and, until the sun sets, her enchantment holds. I find my voice is beautiful like hers, and we speak only in mersong. When the sun rises, Aaeyeli teaches me to swim. Despite being a seaside village, this is not something we teach each other. It is a gift to learn firsthand from someone who has lived



in the sea their entire life and will continue to live in it even after our short lives have ended. Aaeyeli says to close my eyes and remember always that the sea spirit wants to embrace our bodies and lift them up, that as long as I remember this, I will not sink.

The next day, I teach her to walk on the shifting sands. Mermaids are immortals and, within certain limits, can shift the forms of their bodies according to their will. Regardless of how long Aaeyeli frowns and studies my legs, however, the ones she forms are too long and jointless. She towers over me. I do not know how to advise on this, so I show her diagrams of human skeletons. I point at the bones, where they connect, how they bend. I bend my own knees to show her. "Ah," she says and makes the middle of her new legs rubbery. I smile and say she'll get the hang of it.

Aaeyeli is delighted by fire and trees and wind. Her eyes are bright and hungry as she watches me eat despite insisting that she doesn't need physical nourishment. We go out on my family's small boat and float along the coast, always in sight of the village. She sits with her fin in the water and rests her head on the side of the boat so that her hair trails through the water, a wave of lavender in the blue. Her skin is brown like ours, but in the noonday sun, it shimmers as if dotted with small gold disks.

Even on this peaceful day, my chest tightens as I look at her. The mermaids only ever stay for a moon, never longer. The easy days make me restless while Aaeyeli is content to float and stroll and drift.

"Do you not want to know me?" I snap one day.

Aaeyeli rolls over from sunning her back, the wet sand plastered to the flat, featureless plane of her chest. Her brow wrinkles. "I do know you. I have watched your body move through water and air. The tempo of your heart and the prints of your feet in the sand tell me you are eager for life. I like this about you."

"But you've never told me anything about yourself, your family. You've never asked me about my family or my mother and the mermaid she loved and how my mother will miss her forever."

"I see." She relaxes back into the sand. "You know I must go. We all do."

"Why?" I am not ready to go back to relaxing and flirting.

At my challenge, Aaeyeli sits up. "If I do not complete the pilgrimage, I will never be an adult among my people. If I stay, you will not live your life and have your own family."

"I don't want a family. I want you. Please,

after the pilgrimage, won't you come back?"

She begins to shake her head and I cannot bear it. I kiss her and suddenly we are in the sand and careless when I feel the sting of a cut and taste blood in my mouth. Aaeyeli untangles herself from me, full of apologies. The blood keeps filling my mouth. I see the red on her sharp teeth, smeared across her lips. She wipes it away, stands, and wanders into the cresting waves.

I try to enjoy our remaining days. Aaeyeli's touch becomes lingering; her movements are slow as if time might favor her and do the same. I realize that we fought not because she wants to leave but because she too wants to stay. We do not talk about the blood or the fear blooming wild in my chest. When the day comes, I join the girls of my village on the beach and watch the glitter of mermaid scales as they swim away from us forever.



Our mothers treat us like fragile things when the absence of the mermaids is fresh. I spend so much time in the water that my skin seems always wrinkled and my hair becomes brittle from the salt.

I want to understand the devotion that took her away. I have feverish dreams of taking my family's sailboat and embarking on some destinationless

course. I swim until I think I imagine the voice of the sea. All us girls do. Our hope churns the shore of the village, girl limbs chopping up the sea like a storm. I want to understand devotion. I go home and find my mother in the kitchen, back turned to me as she bends over some old family recipe. I embrace her from behind. Into the fabric of her dress, I say, "Will you tell me about when you were seasick?"

She says it's slightly different for everyone and invites me to tell her about my mermaid first. "My mermaid," she says, and that's when I realize how long I've been holding onto my tears, this growing ocean I'd kept secret. My mother's hands smell of fresh-ground spices when she wipes my cheeks dry, and I speak Aaeyeli's name with another human for the first time.

There is a scar on my lip from her, the only evidence that her body touched mine. Sometimes when the tide goes out, I lay on my back in the wet sand and imagine the inside of my mouth is sharp and dangerous like hers.





Queer as the Sea by Sarah Peplow



# Un/Reliable: Reflections in *The Drowning Girl*

---

by Jordan Kurella

“It’s a myth that crazy people don’t know they’re crazy,” India Morgan Phelps (or Imp) writes in *The Drowning Girl*. Or Caitlin R. Kiernan writes. Or Caitlin R. Kiernan writes Imp writing that.

You get it.

Anyway, what Imp says there is true. It’s a myth. I knew I was “crazy” before I knew I was queer. Growing up in the 80s and 90s in the United States (and elsewhere, so many elsewheres), it was easier to know that hearing voices *was* wrong, while kissing girls *was not* wrong.

Seriously, reading *The Drowning Girl* was like looking in a mirror.

Exactly like it. Cause a reflection isn’t a replica, right? A mirror mangles you and turns you around on you, so it’ll never be exact. *Representation Matters*, but it can be hard to get a single individual exactly right, so Kiernan’s book might be the best reflection I’m ever gonna get. Imp hits real close to home. She’s queer and schizophrenic; a writer who lives alone and processes a lot of her feelings and

trauma through her work.

Here’s the turnaround: unlike Imp, I take my medication on a rigid schedule and always see my doctors and have never once been fired from a job. Unlike Imp, I’ve never manifested a hallucination so real I can touch it, but I *have been* so afraid of voices that I’ve stared at a blank spot on the wall while chewing a long-dead piece of gum.

Unlike Imp, I’ve never picked up a hitchhiker by the side of the road, but I’ve tried to be one when my mind was reeling and I jumped out of a car because I didn’t know what was safe or sane. What is real anyway? And that’s the question everyone asks of schizophrenic people: how much do you really know about yourselves?

We know a lot, actually.

Like: I have schizoaffective disorder, bipolar type. My hallucinations and delusions and paranoia all spike in periods of mania, depression, or PTSD. Because yeah, I got that too. I even have a service dog so I can leave the house, when

the PTSD triggers that have me counting every single exit from every single building, every potential danger on the street, every suspicious thing on the sidewalk.

The world is a dangerous place; don't believe the safe hype.

"All beginnings are arbitrary," Imp writes in her room with too many bookshelves. And it's true. In the beginning, I was a girl, apparently. In the beginning, I was dressed in pink and whisked off across the world to so many nice people who pinched my cheeks promised me I'd live happily ever after.

Arbitrary.

That's not how my life went, nor Imp's either. The beginning of The Drowning Girl sets us up to believe that nothing Imp writes down will be real, or has been real, or ever has been real. But the fact is, Imp's life remains real even though parts of it are not. With schizophrenia (and schizophrenia disorders) the veil between fantasy and reality becomes blurred (I say, as a fantasy writer). When not doing well, we don't know where the lie stops and the truth begins.

And this is the arbitrariness of Imp's story.

The fiction, in effect, becomes reality, becomes fiction.

But who she is *really* remains fact. Who we really are, as people, remains fact. Which is where people touch on the unreliable narrator aspect of Imp—and many people with schizophrenia disorders: we aren't who we say we are; we have no grasp on The Real.

That right there, is a lie.

We do know The Real, most of it. We might know we're crazy; we probably know other certain things about ourselves. I know that I am nonbinary and I am a lesbian and that I have to get up in the morning and take my medication. I know exactly how many coffees I need to make it through the day and how good of a girl my service dog is (she is the best).

These things are real.

What is not-unreliable about me (and also Imp) are the inherent truths about me. But these inherent truths sometimes come in conflict with the lies that other people believe. However, these lies rarely fit. Too often, others will coat me in their lies, refusing to believe my own truths, until I, unfortunately, come to believe others too. At one time, I stopped believing my own truths about sexual orientation, gender identity, desire, and more.

When I finally found these lies too uncomfortable to wear anymore, I shed them, much to the chagrin of everyone

who put them on me. I had to shed many of these people, too. Like a skin. So often, people with mental illness/neurodiverse people (especially non cis men) are told to wear lies about themselves like costumes. That inherent truths about themselves cannot be real. That unreliability extends to their core being.

This also is a lie.

Too often has the myth of the unreliable narrator extended from beyond a mentally ill character in fiction, to the mentally ill person actually existing in the physical world. We're treated as the naive ingenue who knows nothing and can know nothing, and needs the hand of a strong (usually) cis man to guide them into who and what they are. This is a dangerous and damning myth.

It, itself, is unreliable.

"There's always a siren singing you to shipwreck," Imp writes. This isn't a mistake: schizophrenia disorders, with their voices and their visions, have been compared to siren song. But the way fiction and media treat people with these disorders are as if we are the sirens; as if we are the mermaids. We have often been depicted as either the mass murderous sirens of Odyssean fate, or warped and trapped figures, doomed to be moored on a rock while our beloveds sail away without us forevermore.

Kiernan has a different take on this idea in *The Drowning Girl*. While suicidality is not completely absent in the book, the fact is, Imp chooses life. As I did. I came back from my psychotic break and the hospital, returning to the college I left dramatically. I returned to sidelong glances and had to pick up pieces and repair a reputation I didn't mean to shatter. But I did it.

It was fine.

What was not fine? Slipping into the skin of who I was, after being told I was too unwell to know who I was for decades. This aspect of being unreliable haunted me forever: that I couldn't know about myself *because schizophrenic*. It was a death sentence to identity. An identity that is real.

Identity is reliable. Ish.

It may have eluded me, especially with how many times people tried to steal it, mask it. How many times people tried to conceal it, dress it up pretty. But I would always be me: in that way, I knew myself, as Imp knew herself. In my experience in social work, we schizophrenic-types are pretty good at knowing exactly who we are.

So as Imp returns to her life after her adventures; as she returns to her work, her room with too many bookshelves, her need to explain and explain and explain.



I know that I have done that too. Once from the psych hospital; more than once as I came into my true self. More than once as I got to know who I really, actually was. Which has less to do with being “crazy,” and more with others’ deciding on how to treat a “crazy” person.

There are a ton of truths that are really not self-evident. Like, I know that the line between fantasy and reality isn’t a wall, it’s a membrane. I know that being unreliable isn’t about me specifically; it isn’t about being schizophrenic or being queer.

It’s about being human.

Or as passable as anyone gets.

Illustration by Kala Tye



# Life as a Twenty-Something Mermaid in Vancouver

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by Emily Deibert

Look, it wasn't like Kalani had planned on becoming one of those sewer mermaids. But she couldn't just live with her parents forever, and by the time she moved out, the prices of lake-view properties had positively sea-rocketed. As for oceanside rentals? Ha! Forget about it. Besides, the place looked cute enough in the photos the realtor sent her, and sewer-chic was kind of in right now anyways.

*Open-concept drain pipe with tunnel access to the ocean, the ad read. Partially-exposed sewer grate with 24/7 view of the sky.*

She told the realtor to book her in for a tour and then hopped on the next current flowing out to the city.

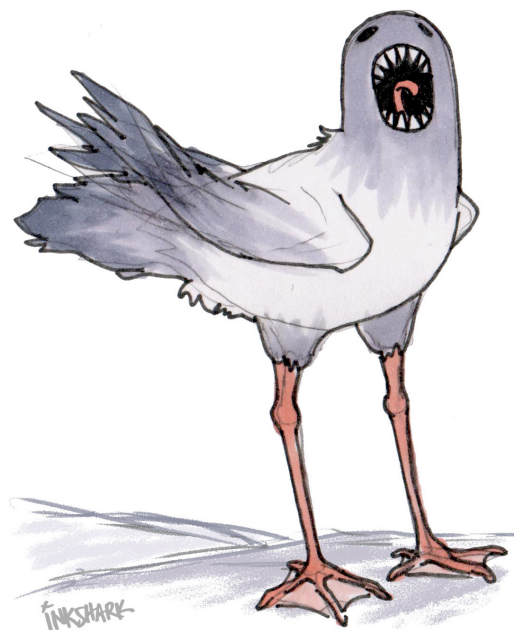
The previous owner's decor left a lot to be desired, but it wasn't anything that a few strings of kelp and some ornamental shells couldn't fix. As for the smell—well, it made Kalani gag, but she knew a mermaid from high school who sold seaweed-scented oils now and could hook Kalani up with a discount if she referred five new customers.

"The neighbourhood's really up-and-coming," the realtor told her. "They're installing a subway line right above this pipe."

It wasn't perfect, but it was either this or a manmade pond out in the suburbs.

"Okay," said Kalani. "I'll take it."

And if she closed her eyes, she could almost pretend that the sewage gushing by above her was really the sound of waves blowing in off the ocean.







**Mergays by Elizabeth Burch-Hudson**

## Want to Run This Ship?

Mermaids Monthly is looking for a new Publishing Team for 2022! We want this team to be BIPOC-led and have a BIPOC editor. We'd love to see an internationally located editorial crew but at least one member of the team will need to be US-based and able and willing to take on the legal business owner/publisher role. No

previous experience is required to apply. Our goal is to make it possible for a new BIPOC editor space to open in the SFWA pro rate magazine field without that person/team having to have money or a ton of industry experience to begin with.

Applications are welcome until July 15<sup>th</sup>..



# our translucent bodies

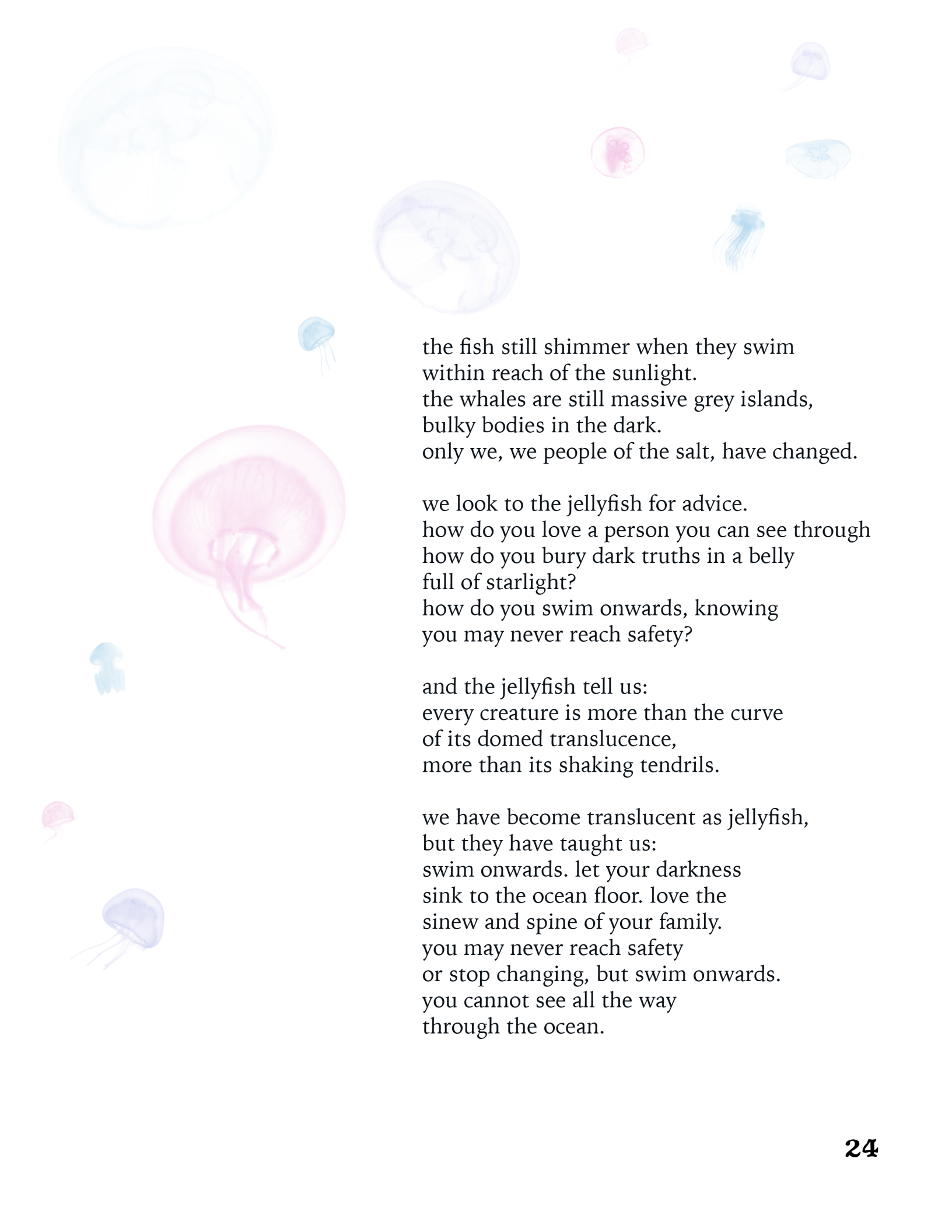
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by Devin Miller

we have become translucent as jellyfish;  
the water has changed us.  
it happened slowly. over time I learned  
the shape of my mother's bones,  
the seagrass strands of my sister's veins,  
the shivering of my love's heart.  
our skin still resists the pressure  
of fingernails and jagged shells and the deep.  
it still protects us.  
but we are not safe; we are changing.

the cold sea tastes different to us  
than it did to our grandmothers.  
rocks where we used to sun ourselves  
see only water-rippled dimness.

our bodies' borders have become invisible.  
I reach for my sister's wrist bone  
and grip too tightly; I press my teeth  
to the curve of my love's belly  
and cannot see I have left marks,  
have left scars, have left tenderness  
behind me. though it's hard to forget  
we are fragile, when we can see each pulse,  
each expanding and contracting  
of each other's lungs.



the fish still shimmer when they swim  
within reach of the sunlight.  
the whales are still massive grey islands,  
bulky bodies in the dark.  
only we, we people of the salt, have changed.

we look to the jellyfish for advice.  
how do you love a person you can see through  
how do you bury dark truths in a belly  
full of starlight?  
how do you swim onwards, knowing  
you may never reach safety?

and the jellyfish tell us:  
every creature is more than the curve  
of its domed translucence,  
more than its shaking tendrils.

we have become translucent as jellyfish,  
but they have taught us:  
swim onwards. let your darkness  
sink to the ocean floor. love the  
sinew and spine of your family.  
you may never reach safety  
or stop changing, but swim onwards.  
you cannot see all the way  
through the ocean.

# Hippocampus Zosteræ

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by David Mohan

*This poem originally appeared in NAILED Magazine*

The hustle goes like this—  
you wait near the sea bottom,  
lost in weed, eyes chameleon,  
your tail a flirtish curl,  
hesitant as a comma,  
an oceanic rhizome.

I come out of the coral,  
the swaying forest of sea grass,  
seeking seduction, my husband.  
We shall swim side by side,  
like riders, coronets  
of our heads held upright.

Spiralling as we rise,  
snouts opposite, we drift  
like shrimp until, our courtship done,  
I give you herds of Highland stock,  
of Suffolk Punch, Exmoor—

a clutch of perfect miniatures.



# Dissolution

by Emily Deibert and Inkshark

Sarah knew something was wrong when the seagull took Amanda's vegan pizza. The slice had been sitting out all afternoon, the not-cheese congealing in the summer sun, and none of the other birds had so much as glanced their way.

But then again, it had been so long since Sarah had come to the ocean. Maybe she'd forgotten how desperate the seagulls were.

She rolled onto her stomach and watched the bird skitter to a stop. It dropped the slice into the frothy water below. *I don't blame you*, Sara thought, and then the bird turned towards her.

Sarah sat up.

"Amanda." Her friend looked over, blinking sunlight from her eyes. "That seagull. It... it *said* something."



Amanda laughed. “The sun’s getting to you, babe. You should drink some water.”

“I’m serious, Amanda. It spoke.”

Amanda sat up, too, concern wrinkling her forehead. “You’re not having, like, an episode, are you? Because of” — she leaned in close— “y’know. Your accident?”

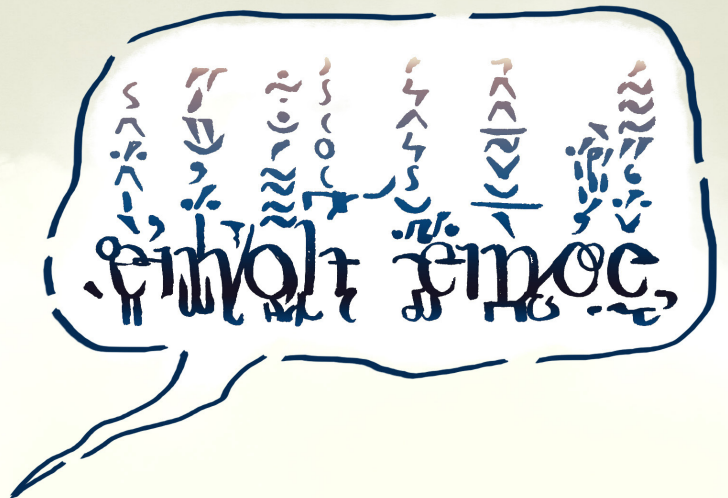
Sarah’s accident. The day her catamaran had capsized, and she’d disappeared for a week before washing up on shore. No injuries. No memories. Nothing to mark the time she’d lost. Just pale skin, puckered fingertips, and lips chapped rough with salt.

“Sarah, is this your first time back? To the ocean?”

“No.” Yes. But that wasn’t relevant, Sarah told herself. The seagull spoke to her. She knew it. She just didn’t know what it was trying to say.

Neither girl pressed it, but the words echoed through Sarah’s mind all afternoon. They gnawed at her as she trudged back to her apartment, and as she ran the water for a bath.

She stared at her reflection, garbled in the foggy bathroom mirror.



She wasn't sure if it came out right. But she said it again as she peeled off her swimsuit, and again as she submerged her body in the tub.

When she said it under the water, she heard it. A message from the ocean.

"Come back to us, Sarah. Come home."



## Deep Water Reading Suggestions

- ~ The Deep - Rivers Solomon
- ~ Every River Runs to Salt - Rachel K Jones
- ~ One Salt Sea - Seanan McGuire
- ~ The Ones We're Meant To Find - Joan He
- ~ The Ship of Stolen Words - Fran Wilde



# Riparian

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By Seanan McGuire

*Content Note: This story contains descriptions of drowning, fat shaming, bullying, and abusive family environments*

Molly begged her mother to let her start mermaid lessons for five years before she finally received her starter tail, a glorious confection of silicon and spandex, designed to envelop her legs before being pulled over her butt and what her mother continued to optimistically refer to as her waist. Molly wasn't sure it counted as a waist when you were as perfectly egg-shaped as she was, a feeling that was shared by most of the girls she went to school with, who seemed to find the overall roundness of her a personal affront, like they thought fat might be catching. Like she would brush against them in the hall one day and they'd wake up the next morning with thighs that rubbed together when they walked and bellies that didn't go quietly into their designer skinny jeans.

Five years of pleading, of wishing, of begging, all because she wanted to be a mermaid, she wanted to work her core and splash around with the other mermaids, and she'd heard it was great exercise (it was) and wasn't she supposed

to exercise more if she wanted to lose weight (she didn't)? Being a fat teenager seemed to be a surprise to everyone else in her family, even though she'd been a fat preteen and a fat child, which meant that waking up on her thirteenth birthday as a fat teenager had felt like the sort of thing that should be absolutely understandable to everyone around her.

"What if they laugh at you?" her mother had asked.

"Being a mermaid is for everyone," she'd replied, over and over again, always trying to sound calm, always trying to sound like the reasonable, rational one, and not like this was what she wanted more than anything. "Besides, swimming when you can't move your legs is a great core workout. It'll be like I'm swimming and doing crunches at the same time."

And because no one wanted her to magically become skinny more than her mother did, and because she rarely asked for the same thing for five years, finally,

her mermaid tail had arrived, and Molly had gone straight down to the swim center to sign up for her first mermaid lessons. She would be graceful and buoyant in the water, a glorious reminder that gravity, not size, was the enemy, and she would be as beautiful and ethereal as any other mermaid...

Or she would have been, anyway. There was nothing in the class description about weight limits, no reason to believe that anyone who had a properly sized and fitted mermaid tail would be turned away, but as she'd been filling out the paperwork and showing her parental permission form, the instructor had come out of the back and looked at her with the mingled expression of alarm and dismay that adults so often seemed to wear when confronted with the reminder that heavy teens existed as more than just faceless bodies on posters about childhood obesity.

Molly pedaled her bike away from the swim center, words still ringing in her ears. "Safety risk" and "unfair" and "exposure to liability." Adults liked to talk about how her body was a disease, how she was an error that needed to be corrected, but they put barriers between her and exercise constantly, even though her doctor said her joints were good and her heart was strong and she could do anything she wanted to try. Can't do that, they don't make workout clothes in your size. Can't do this, what if you make one

of the other students uncomfortable? Can't do anything, can't be allowed to upset the normal people, can't make a spectacle of yourself, can't, can't, can't.

She pedaled hard, heading, not toward home, but for the bike trail through the park. It wasn't a popular place with anyone over the age of twelve or under the age of sixty. Kids went there to run feral along the dirt trails they'd blazed through the blackberry brambles, or to wade at the edges of the river and scare each other with tales of monster salmon lurking in the depths. Seniors went to stroll on the walking paths and look at birds.

Most people Molly's age went to more interesting parks, more interesting places. Molly rode as fast as she dared, the weight of her beloved mermaid tail—so prized only an hour before, such a sign of victory—heavy against her shoulder. Yet again, her body had been too essentially wrong to allow her something normal, no matter how much she wanted it, no matter how safe it was, and yet again, the unfairness of it all burned. Even if she had chosen to be fat, she would have had a right to live a happy and fulfilling life, filled with interesting things that made her happy! Size was not a crime!

She rode her bike over the wooden bridge across the river, then pulled off, dismounting and wheeling it with her down one of the little feral kid trails into

the blackberries. She'd been coming here since she was a kid. She was no longer an architect of the wild, but she knew where the trails tended to form, year after year built on the bones of the wild boys and lost girls who had come before. It was easier to beat down new growth than established canes, and so they followed rules they didn't understand were there, setting the paths of their own futures one muddy footprint at a time. You think you're making your own choices, kids, but really, you're just coloring a little bit outside the lines! Controlled rebellion if there had to be rebellion at all.

Molly scowled and walked until she reached the old fallen tree that had been providing a natural, gently decaying bridge across the river. She leaned her bike up against the gnarled old knot of the roots as she turned to look at the water, which rushed onward as it had always done, as it would always do. she knew the water was reasonably clean, fueled by snowmelt and natural springs; there would be pollution, of course, and it probably wasn't a good idea to put her head under more than absolutely necessary, but no one was going to die from touching the river. It was part of a protected salmon run, after all, without being so protected that it was off-limits to the public.

Molly moved her bike slowly and deliberately into the shade of a large bush and stripped off the outer layer of

her clothing, revealing the plain, sensible one-piece black bathing suit she had worn to the pool in anticipation of being submerged for several hours. Despite her current solitude, she cringed a little and looked around for her classmates, waiting for their laughter, before forcing herself to stand up straighter and stuff her clothing into her backpack, exchanging them for her neatly folded towel. It shouldn't have felt like bravery to stand here in her swimsuit, but it did. One more gift from a world dedicated to making her feel bad about herself whenever possible.

Putting her shoes next to her bag, Molly sat down on a large rock and wiggled into her mermaid tail, exhaling as it settled snugly around her thighs and belly, compressing her usually soft flesh into a harder, sleeker shape. She was a fat mermaid like she was a fat human, but the tightness of her mermaid skin made her feel less bulgy and more powerful.

She wasn't supposed to swim alone while wearing her tail. All the paperwork had included warnings of the increased drowning risk brought on by effectively binding her legs together. But as she snuggled her legs down into the fabric and her feet into the monofin at the end, she felt like all those warnings had been meant for other people, not for her. She was a strong swimmer. She would be fine.

Molly scooted to the edge of the rock



leaned forward until she toppled into the river, kicking frantically as she tried to get her bearings. She was not, in fact, fine.

The effort of kicking seemed impossibly difficult with her legs bound together, and she spun helplessly in the water, moved by the current, flailing her arms in an effort to keep her head above water. What had seemed like such a fun and defiant gesture from the shore now felt like an act of hopeless hubris. Either she was going to drown or someone was going to come along and pull her out, and then she'd get to enjoy the kids she went to school with finding something entirely new to mock her for.

"Did you hear about the fatty?" they'd say, voices bright with the joy of having something awful to discuss. "She nearly drowned in the river trying to pretend she was a mermaid." Oh, they'd laugh and laugh, and if she drowned before someone found her, they'd laugh anyway, because what could be funnier than a dead fat girl with a fishtail?

One way or another, she was screwed. She sucked in a sharp breath of air before going under for what felt like the final time, no longer even steady enough to thrash. The water closed all around her like a dark fist, squeezing her in its fingers so that she barely noticed when something else wrapped its arms around her waist and pulled her back to the surface.

She blacked out somewhere between the middle of the river and the shore. Molly regained consciousness with a mouthful of river water and the hard mud beneath her, a sharp stone digging into her hip. She rolled onto her side and vomited water onto the riverbank, then froze as she realized she was not alone. Her rescuer was still there, sitting next to her. Feeling gross and horrible, Molly rolled over again, to face the person who had saved her.

They were about the same height as she was, with a very similar build. That was where the resemblance stopped. The person sitting next to her was also wearing a mermaid tail, but unlike Molly's, which was rainbow-bright and would absolutely have aided in the locating of her body, this person's tail was golden-brown speckled with black on the bottom, banded in pink along the sides, and white with more black speckles on the top, like they had chosen to become a rainbow trout from the waist down. For whatever reason, the scales continued up along the skin of the person's torso, arms, and bare breasts, spreading even onto their face. Their hair was long and the same shade as the darker part of their tail, tangled around their arms like water weeds. They had a lovely face, but there was something subtly off about it, the eyes just a little too round, the mouth just a little too long. Molly looked quickly away.

"Did the rains wash you in?" asked the stranger, voice sweet alto and soft as spring rain. "I haven't seen your colors or your kind here before."

"No," said Molly, throat raw from inhaling and then expelling river water. "I live...I live nearby."

"Ah," said the stranger. "I live here, in these waters. No rains wash me anywhere."

Molly glanced back at them, trying not to flinch away from the oddness of her rescuer's face. It seemed unkind not to look, when she could so easily have drowned. "Thank you," she said. "I was going under the water, and I would have drowned soon."

"Drowned?" The stranger blinked. For a moment, it looked like they had two sets of eyelids; the ordinary one, and then a thinner, transparent set that closed and opened a moment later, half a second out of synch with the first. "What is drowned?"

"Drowned is when you swallow too much water and you die," said Molly. She finally sat all the way up, looking at the mermaid tail she had coveted so dearly for so long, that had almost killed her on its maiden voyage. Could she ever swim again, after this? She couldn't take classes, she couldn't swim on her own, she was useless. Just a fat, useless lump

of a teenage girl...

Hot tears burned the corners of her eyes. She swiped them viciously away, muttering under her breath.

The stranger watched with obvious concern. "Are you drowning again?" they asked.

"No," said Molly. "I'm crying."

"Crying?"

Did mermaids not cry? It seemed ridiculous. But then, so did the fact that she was sitting here and talking to a mermaid in the first place. Molly wiped her eyes again, forcing herself to smile. "It just means I'm unhappy."

"Why are you unhappy?"

"Drowning makes people unhappy."

"Oh." The mermaid thought for a moment. "Then you shouldn't drown again."

It sounded so sensible when it was said like that, and Molly barked a quick laugh. "No, I shouldn't," she agreed, hooking her thumbs under the top of her tail. "I should go home now."

"You aren't coming to join me in living here?" asked the mermaid, sounding disappointed. "People wash in so rarely."

"I can't," said Molly. "I have to go home and dry off."

The mermaid looked alarmed. "Dry?"

"Dry," said Molly, and began working her tail down, wiggling it over her hips the way she'd practiced. Her mother had insisted that she be able to put the tail on and take it off, even when she was wet, before she'd been willing to agree to the lessons. Molly had thought she was being silly at the time. Now, she was endlessly grateful, even as her flesh bounced back to its usual shape in the absence of the constricting pressure of the tail.

The mermaid stared in obvious horror, but didn't move or try to flee, not until Molly unhooked the monofin and stood, back on her own two legs. Then the mermaid flinched away, before reaching beseechingly for Molly's hand.

"Please," they said. "Please, please, show me how to do. show me how to shift my scales and be on legs like the land people do. Please. I've been so alone."

"Oh," said Molly. "I can't show you how to do that. I'm sorry. But I've always been a land..."

Something rustled in the bushes. With a plonk that Molly had heard before but always ascribed to the local frogs, the mermaid was gone, and Molly was alone.

Two of the feral children emerged from the bushes, stopping when they saw a dripping teenager in a place they thought of as their own. They stared. Molly smiled sunnily back, collecting her things and beginning to wheel her way out of the swamp.

Time to go home.

)-€

"How was your first lesson, honey?" asked her mother, smiling as she passed the mashed potatoes past Molly to her father.

She was on a "diet." Again. Which might have been okay if it had been something her doctor had agreed to, or if it had involved actual nutrition, and not been primarily based around "if you can see Molly eat, she should be eating the most boring salad alive, and dressing is a gift for girls who lose a dress size." Her guidance counselor had already spoken to them about it, twice, telling them that they were only going to make things worse by restricting her calories so horrifically, but it never seemed to get through.

Forcing diets on teenagers felt like a form of torture, and Molly's friends agreed. Even their parents considered it unfair and unreasonable, and most adults seemed to take Molly's weight as a as a personal insult.



Her stomach rumbled. She forked up another bite's-worth of plain lettuce and paper-thin carrot. "Fine," she replied.

"I admit, I wasn't sure about letting you go running around in front of people in something so...tight," said her mother, oblivious to Molly's discomfort. "But if the teacher was willing to have you, it can't be all that bad, and at least it's exercise that won't be too hard on your joints."

"Yes," agreed Molly, as placidly as she could. It was safer. She ate her bite of salad, all but choking it down, and took three more while her parents filled their own plates with food that smelled delicious and looked like freedom, washing them out of her mouth with gulps of plain water, then pushed her chair back, and rose. "May I be excused? I have a lot of homework."

"Of course, dear," said her mother. "Remember, your grades slip, no more mermaid lessons."

"Yes, ma'am," said Molly, and fled without another word, pausing only to collect her dishes and drop them in the kitchen.

The next day after school, she pulled her still-precious, still-beloved tail out of her backpack and rode straight back to the swamp, following the path she'd taken the day before, wiggling the tail over her

hips without hesitation. It came easier this time, way smoothed by practice, and when she pushed off into the water, she found herself swimming more confidently. She wasn't afraid of drowning anymore, and that made all the difference in the world.

Then a hand touched her shoulder, and she turned to see the mermaid watching her. It was funny, almost, how she didn't want to think of the mermaid as "she" until she knew for sure that it was the right pronoun, but could still think of them as a "mermaid" and not anything more general.

"Are you a girl?" she blurted.

"You came back," said the mermaid. Then: "Yes. Can't you tell? I have my pretty scales on for summer." And she turned in the water, showing the pink stripes on her sides.

"I'm sorry," said Molly. "Land people don't change colors with the seasons. I'm Molly."

"Oh. I'm Ametrine. I didn't think you'd come back after all the drowning. You seemed so unhappy."

"I was. I am. I mean...I want to learn how to swim better. Can you teach me?"

Ametrine looked surprised. "I can teach you," she said. If that's what you want to

learn, I can teach.”

“Please,” said Molly fervently.

“Then there will be teaching,” said Ametrine, and offered Molly her hands. Laughing in relief and delight, Molly took them and let herself be pulled toward the middle of the river.

What began then were the best two months of Molly’s life to date. Ametrine was surprisingly funny for someone who had almost no experience dealing with other people, and very clever; Molly rarely had to explain something more than once. Molly wasn’t quite so gifted. When Ametrine showed her how to dive, how to roll in the water, how to move like the tail was a part of her and not a tool purchased from a small company in Malibu, Molly often needed two or three tries to really get it down. But Ametrine never judged, never treated Molly like she was somehow lesser for not being born to the water.

And they talked. There was time for talking, after lessons, when they sat on the rock, Molly letting the water seep out of her tail, the two of them so close to together that their shoulders brushed. Ametrine was the only mermaid in the river, it seemed; she didn’t even know if what she was could be called a mermaid, since she didn’t like the taste of the sea. She’d been there once, had swum along with the current until her river opened up into the sound, and followed the currents

from there to the sea.

“I could hear them singing in the distance,” she admitted, voice going soft. “They were very far away, and their songs were no songs I knew, and I was afraid, and the water burned my throat. If I went all the way out into the deep, I worried I would drown.”

“But you didn’t know what drowning was.”

Ametrine bumped her shoulder against Molly’s. “I worried I would cease to be,” she said. “My mother ceased to be, when I was very small, and left me here alone.”

Molly blinked, then slid an arm around Ametrine’s shoulders and gave her a half-hug. “I’m sorry,” she said.

“It was very long ago,” said Ametrine. “There was no forever-tree across the river, then.” She indicated the bridge. “That came later. I had to hide while it was being made.”

Molly wanted to ask why it had been necessary to hide, but only a moment’s thought gave her the answer. People laughed at her and pointed their fingers and acted like she wasn’t human, all because she was heavier than they thought she should be. Her body knew what shape it wanted. Her body said that she was fine and healthy at the size that suited her, and didn’t make her feel like

she was less when she wanted to swim, or climb, or play at being a mermaid. And despite all that, she was still human.

Ametrine was a girl with scales on her skin and fins where her feet were meant to be. Her hair was as close to green as it was to brown. People would do more than point and laugh if they saw her. They would pull her out of the river and lock her away somewhere for study, and she would never be free again. Molly tightened her arm around Ametrine's shoulders. That wasn't going to happen to her friend, not ever.

That night, she pedaled home, tail wet and dripping over her shoulder, clothes damp and sticking to her skin, and barely managed to stop herself from recoiling when her mother slammed the door open and stormed out onto the porch.

"What kind of a joke is this?" she demanded, brandishing a copy of the park department newsletter at Molly as if it meant something.

"Um..." said Molly.

"Oh, I'm sorry, do you not attend your English classes, either?" Her mother turned the newsletter around and read, shrilly, "'Madison Walters's mermaid class, a first-time offering for the district, has been canceled due to a lack of student signups. Miss Walter will be remaining with the faculty to join our normal staff

of swim coaches and instructors.'" She lowered the paper, scowling. "Where have you been every afternoon this week?"

"I...I just...I was so heartbroken when they canceled the class that I've been going down to the river to swim with a friend!"

"A 'friend'?"

"Yes, my friend Amy. She was in the class with me. We keep each other safe in the water."

Her mother scowled. "Well, let this Amy know that if she wants to spend time with you, she can come over and do it in the living room like a civilized person. We didn't pay for those classes so you could splash around in a filthy river like a wild thing. You need to be getting proper exercise." She surged forward, snatching the tail off of Molly's shoulder. "And you won't be needing this anymore," she added, before storming back inside.

Molly stared after her, speechless in her horror, before she put her hands over her face and began to cry. The door remained closed. She was alone.

After several minutes, she wiped her eyes and slung her leg back over her bike. She couldn't go in there. Not now. Maybe not ever again.



Slowly, Molly pedaled back down the street, heading for the park beside the river.



Molly stripped down to her swimsuit and flung herself into the water like a rock dropped from the bridge, hitting with an enormous splash that drove her halfway down to the riverbed before she bobbed back to the surface and began swimming with an angry, distance-eating breaststroke that carried her from one end of the area where she and Ametrine liked to swim to the other in minutes. She was on her third lap when Ametrine popped up at the middle of the river, watching her silently.

She was on her fifth lap when Ametrine finally spoke, asking, “Are you well?”

“No,” snapped Molly. Then she stopped, bobbing upright in the water, and pushed her sodden hair back from her face with both hands, kicking to keep herself afloat. “I’m sorry. I shouldn’t yell at you for things you didn’t do.”

“What is wrong?”

“My mother...she found out that I haven’t been taking mermaid lessons.” Molly lowered her hands. “She took my tail away.”

“But you have been taking mermaid

lessons,” said Ametrine. “You’ve been taking them with me. I’ve been teaching you how to be a better mermaid. If she doesn’t like how I teach, tell her to come down here and say it to me directly, not to yell at my student.”

Molly blinked, momentarily transported by the image of her mother having a conversation with her mermaid. The idea was almost funny enough to crack the shell of her despair. Almost, but not quite. “She thinks I’ve been lying to her so I could spend my tuition money on donuts and chocolate bars.”

“What are donuts and chocolate bars? What is tuition money?”

“Delicious things with a lot of calories. If you eat too many of them, you can get sick to your stomach, and they can make you fat, like me,” said Molly bitterly. She had always wished her fatness came from chocolate bars and donuts, from choices she had made for herself, and not from the choices made by her body without her input, by genetics and generation after generation of peasant girls working to survive hard seasons on the farm. It would have been so easy to be the daughter her mother wanted her to be, if it had been a matter of making choices and not a matter of making war against her own body, which was a perfectly good body and only behaving as it had been bred to behave.

“Oh.” Ametrine bobbed in the water, frowning. Then, almost shyly, she said, “I could really teach you how to be a better mermaid, if you wanted me to. If it would convince your mother to leave you alone.”

“What do you mean? How?”

“I could make you so you could stay here, with me, for always.”

Molly splashed backward in the water, startled. “You can...but why would you do that? Why would you want me to stay with you?” Why didn’t you offer to do this before? Why did you have to wait until I wouldn’t really have a choice?

“You are my friend. No one has been my friend in very long, and I want you to be safe and well and where you are happy. If your home does not make you happy, this could be your home.” Ametrine looked at her gravely, eyes wide and bright with hope. “You could stay with me.”

Molly looked at her and swam slowly forward, toward her. “I can’t live in the water,” she said. “I’d get too cold.”

“I could keep you warm.”

“I’d get hungry.”

“I could bring you food.”

They were almost nose to nose now, eyes

locked on each other, and the moment felt far more important than it had any reason to be, and Molly was still treading water, holding her head above the surface through sheer force of stubborn will.

“I’d—”

“If you don’t want to stay, you don’t have to stay, but I was lonely before you came, and I don’t want to be lonely again. Anything you need for happiness, I will gladly find a way to provide you. Anything you need for comfort, you can find it by my side. If you want to go, you can go, and you can always come back again, but the only thing between you and staying with me is your own objections. Please. Stay with me.”

Molly only hesitated for a moment before she asked, “Will it hurt?”

And Ametrine smiled, and her teeth were small and white, and very, very sharp, like razors made of bone.

“Of course it will hurt,” she said.

“Glorious things always do.”

Molly thought for a long while, treading water as her limbs grew colder. She thought of her mother, insisting that she loved Molly while her love destroyed her daughter by inches. She thought of her father standing by, as if abuses perpetrated against a fat girl weren’t abuses at all, just manifestations of the

world struggling to set itself right. She thought of the other students at her school, who treated her like a toy to be broken for their own amusement, and like she didn't really matter at all, like she never could.

And she thought about Ametrine, who looked at her like she was beautiful—who made her feel like maybe, somehow, the mermaid was seeing the truth and everyone else was seeing the lie. Ametrine, who was her friend.

Ametrine, who was offering to be her home.

"All right," she said, and closed her eyes, so she wouldn't see the moment when her friend became her predator, and when the pain came, she let it carry her away, and the agony was everything. The agony was all.

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They found Molly's bike, but they never found her body. She was reborn in memory, through one of the oldest alchemical rites known to the high school world, as the

perfect golden girl she had never been in their presence, popular and perfect, even if they could never quite bring themselves to recast her as beautiful. The bridge was renamed in her honor, and the feral children were cautioned against going too close to the water, a piece of advice they heeded not at all. Time passed. The edges of the loss were worn away.

And when the summer came, some of the feral children claimed they'd seen mermaids, two of them, with tails of silver and rose, tangled in each other's arms like water weeds, forever laughing, lost in the mysteries of one another's eyes.

Illustration by Mimi Silverstein





# Our Contributors

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**Brandon O'Brien** is a writer, performance poet, teaching artist and game designer from Trinidad and Tobago. His work has been shortlisted for the 2014 Alice Yard Prize for Art Writing and the 2014 and 2015 Small Axe Literary Competitions, and is published in *Strange Horizons*, *Reckoning*, and *New Worlds, Old Ways: Speculative Tales from the Caribbean*, among others. He is the former poetry editor of *FIYAH: A Magazine of Black Speculative Fiction*. His debut poetry collection, *Can You Sign My Tentacle?*, is forthcoming from Interstellar Flight Press.

**David Mohan** is a poet and short story writer based in Dublin. His poetry has been published in *The Cincinnati Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Lake Effect*, *Stirring*, *Measure*, *Superstition Review*, *New World Writing*, *PANK* and *Dialogist*. His poetry has been nominated for The Pushcart Prize.

**Devin Miller** is a queer, genderqueer cyborg and lifelong denizen of Seattle, with a love of muddy beaches to show for it. Their short fiction has appeared in *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*; previous poetry can be found in *Liminality* and *Abyss & Apex*, and on select King County Metro bus terminals. You can find Devin and their cat on Twitter @devzmiller.

**Elizabeth Burch-Hudson** was raised in the Midwest where her creativity only managed to get her into plenty of trouble, but finally, the hell out of Dodge. Burch-Hudson is now an award-winning queer artist and writer based in Los Angeles. While her mind still gets her into trouble, she has learned to wrestle her demons into her writing and makes art for all the quiet, sad queer girls who haven't quite found their voice yet. Visit her website at <https://elizabethburch-hudson.com/>.

**Emily Deibert** is a writer and astronomer from Toronto, Canada. When she isn't busy studying other worlds in our galaxy for her thesis, she spends her time dreaming up new worlds for her short stories. You can find her on Twitter @emilydeibert.

# Our Contributors

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**inkshark** is a scandalously queer illustrator, author, and editor who lives in the rainy wilds of the Pacific Northwest. He enjoys exploring with his dogs, writing impossible things, and painting what he shouldn't. When his current meatshell begins to decay, he'd like science to put his brain into a giant killer octopus body with which he promises to be very responsible and not even slightly shipwrecky. Pinky swear.

**Jennifer Lee Rossman** (she/they) is a queer, disabled, and autistic author and editor from Binghamton, New York. She's pretty sure mermaids are a type of platypus. Follow her on Twitter @JenLRossman and find more of her work on her website <http://jenniferleerossman.blogspot.com>

**Jordan Kurella** is a queer and disabled author who has lived all over the world (including Cairo and Chicago). In their past lives, they were a barista, radio DJ, and social worker. Their work has been featured in *Apex Magazine*, *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, and *Strange Horizons*.

**Kala Tye** resides in the PNW, from HI, more than likely a stack of crows in a jumpsuit. Pronouns are They/Them. I enjoy fantasy work that has a sharp edge, where fairies have fangs and mermaids sing to lull you onto their dinner plates. My favorite mediums are digital painting and watercolors, but acrylics enjoy their turn too. Having felt often neglected in my own representation in media, I am driven to be as inclusive and body positive as possible in my work, doing my best to draw from a diverse pool of people. We all deserve our stories to be told.

**Mimi Silverstein** is an artist, illustrator, and writer who has been enthralled with all things mermaid since childhood. When she isn't painting, drawing, or creating relief prints, she can be found exploring the beautiful landscape around her in Burlington, Vermont, reading, daydreaming, and snuggling her darling tuxedo cat Pantalaimon. Mimi's art can be found at [mimisilverstein.com](http://mimisilverstein.com) and @painter\_fairy on instagram.

# Our Contributors

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**Rod M. Santos** (he/him) was born in Manila, raised in the Bronx, and is currently lost in Yonkers. His humor and stories have found kind, loving homes, including *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, *F&SF*, *Unidentified Funny Objects 6*, and *The Lavender Menace: Tales of Queer Villainy!* Sadly, he doesn't know how to swim, but if he ever finds himself in the middle of the ocean, his plan is to be rescued by an adorable dolphin. A hunky merman would also be acceptable. Rod wishes you all a Happy Pride month.

**Sara Eileen Hames** is a mixed media artist and writer working in Brooklyn, NY. Ze makes art about monsters, emotions, landscapes, and other aggressively beautiful things, prioritizing detail, color, and tenderness. Sara's art has appeared in four solo shows and several group shows, most recently at the Carrie Able Gallery where ze was an artist in residence in the summer of 2020. Hir poetry, short fiction, and illustration have been published internationally. Ze holds an undergraduate degree from Columbia University, and a Masters of Creative Writing from The University of Sydney. When not making art, ze parents two small whirlwinds in the shapes of human children. Find hir on Twitter and Instagram @saraeileen.

**Sarah Peploe** writes short stories, makes comics (with Mindstain Comics) and illustrates poetry collections (with Anna Percy, John G. Hall, Henry Arthur Thorpe and others). She lives in York and tweets @SarahPeploe

**Seanán McGuire** was born in Martinez, California, and raised in a wide variety of locations, most of which boasted some sort of dangerous native wildlife. Despite her almost magnetic attraction to anything venomous, she somehow managed to survive long enough to acquire a typewriter, a reasonable grasp of the English language, and the desire to combine the two. The fact that she wasn't killed for using her typewriter at three o'clock in the morning is probably more impressive than her lack of death by spider-bite.

**Tamara Jérée's** short stories appear or are forthcoming in *Strange Horizons*, *Beneath Ceaseless Skies*, *Anathema: Spec from the Margins*, *FIYAH*, and others. Their poem "goddess in forced repose," published in *Uncanny Magazine*, was a finalist for the Ignyte Award. You can find them on Twitter @TamaraJeree or visit their website [tamarajeree.com](http://tamarajeree.com).



# About Us

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**Julia Rios** (they/them) is a queer, Latinx writer, editor, podcaster, and narrator whose fiction, non-fiction, and poetry have appeared in *Latin American Literature Today*, *Lightspeed*, and *Goblin Fruit*, among other places. Their editing work has won multiple awards including the Hugo Award. Julia is a co-host of *This is Why We're Like This*, a podcast about the movies we watch in childhood that shape our lives, for better or for worse. They've narrated stories for *Escape Pod*, *Podcastle*, *Pseudopod*, and *Cast of Wonders*. They're @omgjulias on Twitter.

**Ashley Deng** (she/her) is a Canadian-born Chinese-Jamaican writer with a love of fantasy and all things Gothic. She studied biochemistry with a particular interest in making accessible the often-cryptic world of science and medicine. When not writing, she spends her spare time overthinking society and culture and genre fiction. Her work has appeared at *Nightmare Magazine*, *Fireside Magazine*, and *Queen of Swords Press* and you can find her at [aedeng.wordpress.com](http://aedeng.wordpress.com) or on Twitter at @ashesandmochi.

**Meg Frank** (they/them) is a Hugo-nominated artist based in New York. In the before times they traveled a lot and spent a lot of time looking up in museums. Currently they are keeping themselves busy with art school, two cats, knitting for their family, and this magazine. They're @peripateticmeg on Twitter.

**Lis Hulin Wheeler** (she/her) lives outside Boston with her spouse and child and spends her days chasing mail carriers and citing obscure postal regulations.

Find her on Twitter or Goodreads and her work at *Ninestar Press* and *The Future Fire*. She also serves as Fiction Editor and Logistics Manager for *Wizards in Space Literary Magazine* (check them out!) and slushreads for various genre publications.

