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FROM 'HERMIONE'

Katy Gunn

Hermione turned the beach hanging from her neck on its head and considered coastal abrasion. She had just read a book about it and another book about it. She had just listened to a podcast. The granules would eventually grind the joint of the hourglass thin, scrape through. Hermione shook her pendant, feeling, as always, like she should know more than that.

She did, of course. The length of time it takes to wear away a surface depends on the hardness and concentration of each abrasive little shard. Sand is eroded rocks, shells, and other remains of life. Left still under enough pressure for a calculable amount of time, the shards will begin to consolidate again. Sedimentary rock is classified according to the particles from which it is composed. *Pendant* does not always mean *bauble*. It can also refer to a composition intended to complement another composition. *Complement* is yet another term for the number of people required to man a ship.

With the amount of vaguely related information she could bring to mind, she could solve any number of constructed puzzles, weave in the loose ends of nearly any plot. Or she could not.

*

The next exercise was recognizing all she did not frequently have occasion to think of as her own. Toenails peeling the insides of her shoes, ligaments holding the front of each thigh to its socket, the pelvic angles at which separate filaments blinked white with microscopic tears. Her shoulders set back.

She did not jog backwards just for the sake of. She was reeling to foster some correspondence between those shoulders and anything she might eventually think to direct them to do.

Her shoe caught half treadmill edge and half moving belt. Or she backed up with confidence, knocking into the controls. It was always something. It was all indicative of why Monica had to keep up the going backwards, even if her husband worried when he passed her workroom on his way downstairs to accept from the

mail carrier more boxes of imported glue.

Monica steadied herself with the handles and let go for most of the morning. Behind her head, the movie cut to the same commercial five times. Hermione appeared during these breaks too. The commercial advertised a double marathon of adventures involving her younger self and a prisoner, a stone, a chamber of secrets.

Her mother washed her sweat off by sinking back into her box of waves. They were so steady and small, beating her back, that she could not differentiate one from the other, could only feel them as one hard, sustained shove.

*

Hermione turned her hourglass over and climbed up the steps to her old house. In the window, her mother and father faced the television. The bright screen condensed their heads into two dark holes. The one with her hair knotted nodded at the picture, a familiar vessel bobbing in place.

In the doorway, framed by the white afternoon, Hermione watched herself drag herself down from upstairs. She gave herself a glance, a knowing look. At least recognition. Hermione lifted her professorial pointer to indicate her mother, the back of her head. Engulfed by television light, its fuzzy edges rippled. The circumference ebbed.

Hermione leaned close enough to count the folds of white in her knot. Her mother smelled like attempts by bath product creators to pin down a fragrance wholly unlike cormorant droppings, stranded shellfish, decomposing loggerheads, and petroleum, yet reminiscent of the seaside.

She pictured herself pressing her nose into her mother's hair. Further, into the cast of her face. Hermione tapped herself gently on the shoulder with her wand, like a teacher. She had thought it over long and hard and over. Obliviate, Hermione pointed.

On the day the cruise liner left, Monica wore white high heels that filled with sand. Teetering toward the stairway, she sucked heavy air into her mouth and would not imagine it tasting like anything but exactly like what she knew herself always to have wanted.

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Katy Gunn hula hoops and swallows swords. Her first book, *Textile School*, is forthcoming from The Lit Pub.