

Fishing Lines

by Cecilia Kennedy

On the rocky stretches of Whidbey Island, my mother found a broken fishing line. It shined in the light that tore through the clouds, so she picked it up and held it in her right palm until the wind bit through her skin, causing her to stick her hand in her coat pocket. She said she felt the strand reach from her palm and cut right through the fabric of her pocket, burrowing itself into her side, deep within, planting itself right under her belly button. Doctors couldn't remove it, so she learned to live with it. In fact, she grew to love its thin, silky nature—its pearly white sheen.

One day, it sloughed off golden seeds that scattered upon the ground when she walked. I grew from one of these seeds, sprouting up right beside her, with my own strand of fishing line, attached to hers.

When I was a child, she used to bring me to the playground, and we'd sit side by side in the sand box while the other kids ran around, playing. I'd been told, quite firmly, not to get up and run. The fishing line that held us together would be fatal to both of us if it broke. To remind me of our fragile existence, the line sometimes bleeds, thick crimson drops beading and running from my side to hers, meeting in the middle and falling in gelatinous globules that break and spread. If she bends down to clean them up, I must bend too, and so that's just how we go—my mother and I—coordinating our movements, day to day.

Often, I long to go to school, like others my age, but I take my lessons at the kitchen table, my mother beside me, reading books, tackling assignments—and she always has something to say. Sometimes, it's a word of praise, but usually, it's long, thin strokes of the pen, her words over mine—not side-by-side, but directly over: "Here, let me do it for you." And

inside, I slowly hear the voice in my head soften. Eventually, I just hand my pen to her.

* * *

On a windy day in Whidbey, my mother and I walk the beach, but I can't seem to take my eyes off the water. I stop my mother's steps at least five times before I come to a complete stand-still. She asks me what I'm looking at. I'm not really sure. It's something that shines—something thin and wavy—almost imperceptible, and the voice inside my head grows louder—the one I didn't think I had anymore. And it tells me to find out more. So, I take a step forward. My mother pulls back. I rush ahead, breaking the rules. I feel a tremendous pull, a tension, a pain ripping right at the center of my stomach. Blood tints the water, but I swim out anyway and reach for the wavy thing shining in the light, my right palm entangled in fine seaweed threads that slip through my fingers—my mother's form a distant slash, waving in the wind on the shore.

CECILIA KENNEDY (she/her) taught English and Spanish language/literature in Ohio for 20 years before moving to Washington state with her family. Since 2017, she has published her stories in international literary journals, magazines, and anthologies. Her work has appeared in *Pigeon Review*, *Maudlin House*, *Coffin Bell*, *Idle Ink*, *Tiny Molecules*, *Streetcake Magazine*, *Wrongdoing Magazine*, *Rejection Letters*, *Open Minds Quarterly*, *Headway Quarterly*, *Flash Fiction Magazine*, Kandisha Press, Ghost Orchid Press, and others. Additionally, she enjoys being a volunteer adult beverages columnist for *The Daily Drunk*, a proofreader for *Flash Fiction Magazine*, and a concept editor for Running Wild Press. Twitter: @ckennedyhola