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The Margaret Owen Finck Award for Prose

# Today is Wednesday

Claire Franczyk

Today, the Queen of Picket Fence is a brunette, with big, grey eyes and tiny feet. The crown she wears is made of things she finds and steals; 47 feathers and 24 shells, and one large stone that is as grey as her eyes and that appeared on her fence on Sunday, unbidden, without ceremony, and with no letter of introduction. That it breached such decorum is the reason she kept it: balancing on one foot with her other leg extended in a graceful line that reached behind her head, she looked like a dancer, or a particularly dexterous flamingo, as she scratched her ear absentmindedly with her toes while she set The Stone on a length of braided string, then wrapped it around her head so that now it hangs like a pendulum between her eyes.

12

Today is now Wednesday and the effect is remarkable. Those eyes, set wide apart in her face, are fringed with the darkest, densest foliage of lashes. When she blinks then opens them, the energy that generates from so small a motion grazes our faces, and blows back our hair. Invariably those eyes grow wider when she deigns to look at you, two shallow pools of opalescence that seem to swim in a saline solution that never appears anything but greasy, two oysters exposed and pulsating in their shells, shocked at the invasion of cold oxygen and the conviction of impending ruin.

Today being Wednesday, the Queen of Picket Fence's teeth are lovely to behold in their irregularity: when she smiles they are small and white with uneven spaces, and she wets her lips before she parts them. But she hardly ever smiles, and it is because of these things that we love her.

As of this moment, this being Wednesday, the Queen is sixteen years old, and she rules from on high, delicately tripping along the railing, raining down feathers and insults in her wake, performing her famous high wire act. Her crown of plume, shell and Stone flutters as she runs along that narrow path off of which to one side is only open air – for we have never

been to nor even seen the other side – and off the other, our side, the land of Picket Fence, called Yard, where we have continuous tea parties and play croquet in brightly colored sundresses and boater hats.

It is important to note that the Queen is always barefoot when she runs. She prefers the feel of the wood and chipped paint to shoes, and especially the sharp splinters that pierce her soles in their effort to be nearer to her. She has never stepped off that fence for which Picket Fence is named, nor has she ever allowed anyone or anything to touch her except for what she finds and steals, or what pierces her feet. The Queen often spends hours with her back to us, sitting cross-legged, balanced on a picket. When she does this, she holds a mirror in her hand and examines her face, crossing and uncrossing her eyes at herself and humming disjointedly as she ignores everyone around her. Mostly though, she just blows kisses at her reflection.

The Queen is not the only one of aristocratic legacy in the vicinity, although she likes to think so. Across Yard and in House, the Duke of Newel Post sits astride his banister, and surveys his subjects of Hall with an air of disdain and mahogany. Beneath his hard exterior lies a heart as warm as Cherry Oak that beats only for the Queen. The Duke's domain is indoors, hers out, but from his perch he can see beyond the curtains and out of the bay windows to Picket Fence, and the Queen whose eyes blink and lips blow kisses from high on the fence upon which he left the round grey stone that was as grey as her eyes and that he knew she would keep because of its lack of decorum. Catching sight of her, his face shines with Pine-Sol and floor wax, his body vibrating and humming under her gaze. But that is all they ever do, Blink and Blow, Vibrate and Hum, and we continue to play croquet, because it is Wednesday.