

There was an old fisherman's tale
in the seashore town the boy grew up in

where is—?

Gone, too.
That's three
in a month.

the boy's mother,
like the rest of the
townspeople, told
him every day —

Never go fishing at
Mermaid Rock — for no
man who was foolish
enough has
ever returned

An iridescent islet lined
with sea creatures of
strange colors —

the boy imagined that
the reason no man returned
was simply because they
never saw a reason to.

The boy spent
countless hours looking from the shore—
until the boy became a man
and he could do
whatever he wished



Wish me luck,
for today I go
fishing to
Mermaid Rock.

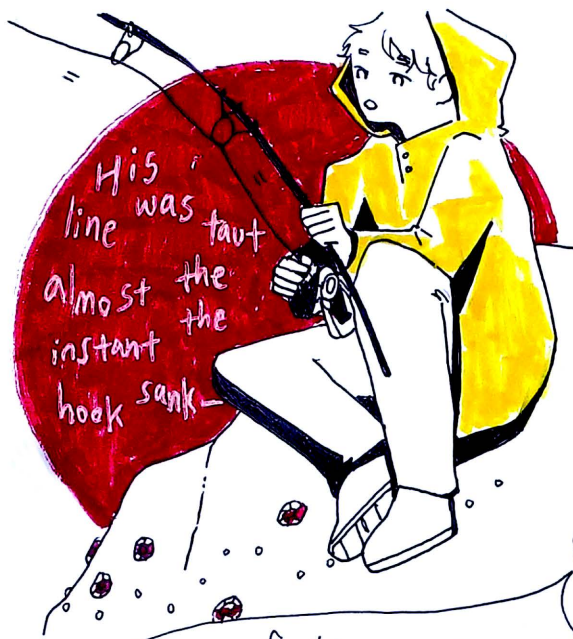


As he drew closer to the islet,
the man felt his whole body relaxing

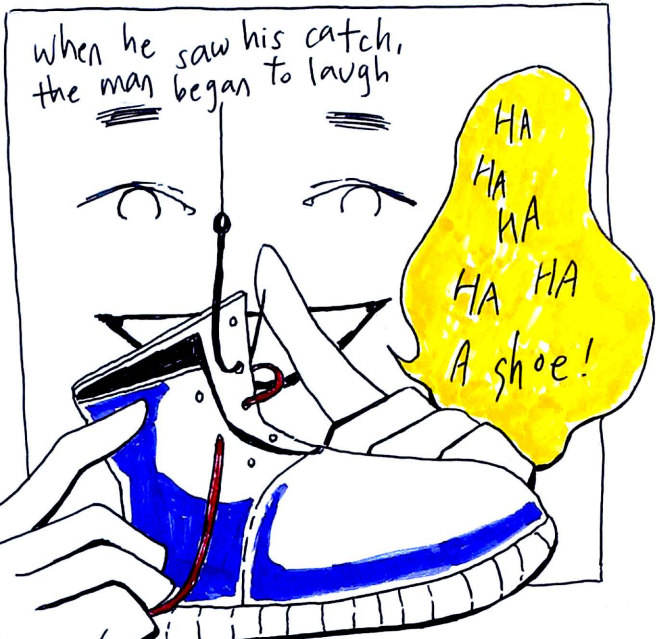


And when he made full contact
the cool touch of
rock felt like
the warmest
embrace





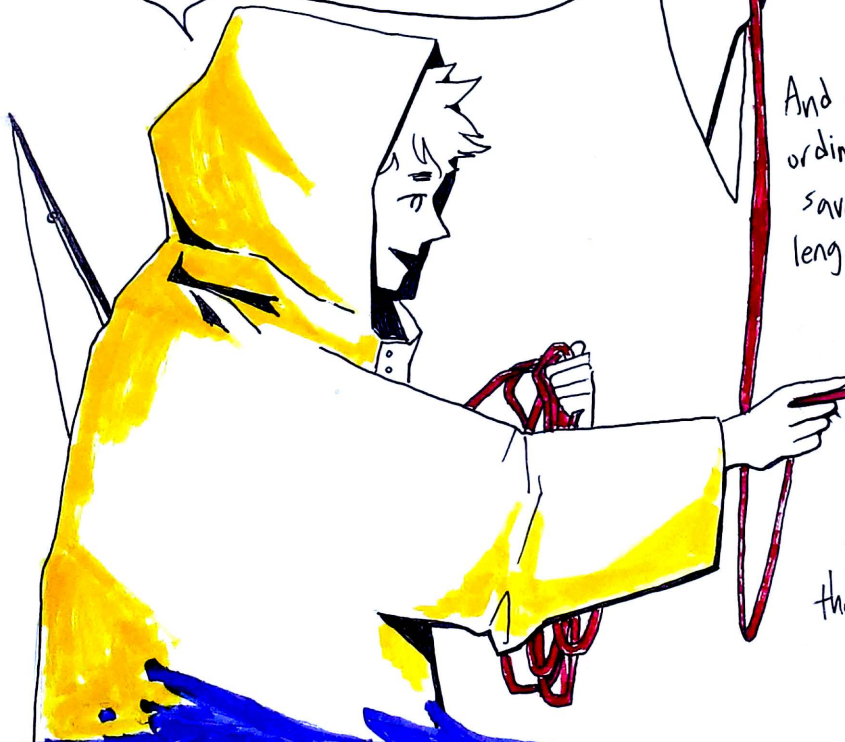
His line was taut almost the instant the hook sank—



when he saw his catch, the man began to laugh

HA
HA
HA
HA HA
A shoe!

All that fretting over Mermaid Rock, just for a shoe!



And it was a perfectly ordinary shoe at that, save for the unusual length of its lace—

compelled by curiosity, the man waded through the dark waters to see the fiber's end

Minutes, hours, maybe even days had passed— when the man began to consider turning back, he noticed a delicious, sweet scent—



And
A Stench
of Rotting
Flesh.



RAPHOD

4