

THE WOODS

Fiona Kuntz

She's a mad hatter. Wild smirk, extended pinky, eying her guests more than the buffet. Her cup is bitter but never dry as she twines snatches of conversation into riddles. The party delights in sardonic humor and cackling gossip, scorning the world behind its back as though they won't drain their cups and face it. Her chin remains canted in soft triumph from the head of her sugar glass table, even as the seats empty and chatter stills. The grove succumbing to the hush. *She will never leave.*

He's an alice. Mild manners and naivete flung into the trailless topsy turvy woods he was so certain he wanted. He is well meaning stumbles, foolish optimism, and in far far over his head. Constructing reasonable card houses from nonsensical surroundings and scattering to the wind when it blows them down. His limbs are tired. His heart strained as he clings to his rotting ideals with white knuckled fists. Always asking for directions when there are none. *He will never stop trying.*

They're a cheshire cat. A quick quipping jester whose neck is mysteriously swapped or vanished once placed on the chopping block. They're honest equivocations. Half-told truths. Deceitful as Cassandra and tangible as a rumor. A knowing grin curls across their lips as they splash in the chaos like mud puddles. Trying is useless they'll tell you. And a barrier is still a cage. They laugh when others curse and scream and sob---and request no forgiveness. Tracing loops between the trees. *They went mad long ago.*