

FIDDLE FATHOMS

A FANTASY CHAPBOOK

From the Author of *I Call My Sexuality My God: My Shampoo and My Watermelon Juice*

VICTORIA IFEOLU

FOUNDLING ADORNED: A Short Story

Elk Coast (Kingdom of Hardelands)

Grasses of Hardelands: tastier than Queen Bashin's salads... basil-greener than her maidservants' envy. South-bound skies customarily curve up to imitate their synergy. Rain drops, beaded like no woman's business, dot each strand like forgiving needles. Hardelands: haunt of lure untellable. Tireless herbivores wander unscarred: the King's able ol' herd, they wax ferocious and adorable in gritty ol' build, growing ferryable in bleating ol' breed. All "herbivores" but one...: only a few have heard or beheld... Fellow humans gasp to tell the tale... "Fellow" herbivores analyze the sight in utter discomfort...; and "fellow" monsters?

The Royal House of Sunderlands counts this day momentous; fortune has found the Gates of Sunderlands. Today they unite with the capital in marriage – a feat the other subject-kingdoms have fantasized about all century. The Sunderland King hardly objected to any aspect of the arrangement, so much so that he accepted Hardelands' offer to expedite the ceremony, thereby bypassing protocols that have guided the kingdoms for over forty decades. Far be it from him to wait away his ray of luck – or wait at all when the stakes are high.

Every living being in Sunderlands has envisioned the day the Princess of Hardelands – future Queen of Sunderlands – would step into her new Palace in her chartreuse warmth, her aura infecting the parakeets and hamsters, causing them to blaze half as brilliantly as her gladiate hair. Not many, however, have seen the Princess – not even the best of Hardelands' commoners. Rumor has it that the Princess has a seductive overtone to her charm, and will unintentionally seduce any man that draws forth her gaze. Lo, today is the day the rightful begetter of her gaze gets to steal the show. It's her wedding day...

"To the bride and groom!" Osculan, the Master of Ceremony cheers.

"To the bride and groom!" All members of the partaking royal houses respond, raising their cups high above their yodeling heads.

"To a union with the capital!" Osculan is known for overstepping his bounds, and today is glaringly not an exception. On noticing the delicate silence, and of course, the distasteful cringing on Sunderlandian faces, he repaints the atmosphere...

"Long live the Shuddalands!" He repents.

"Long live the Shuddalands!" As though to absolve him of his careless reference to the Sunderlandians as gold-diggers, the royal houses take it from here, chanting in mellifluous unison. They halt to applaud the Sunderland King as he walks forward to address the gathering.

"Royals of the Shuddalands, I bring you greetings from the people of Sunderlands. It is with remarkable pleasure that I celebrate this great espousal. My son, Prince Stephen, heir to the Sunderland throne, shall be tying the knot with the foremost daughter of Hardelands, Princess Phoebe, on this sacrosanct day – a day both kingdoms have eagerly waited for..." King Erod unsuspectingly proceeds with his speech, even as a steady undertone of murmurs vaults around the hall.

“Such an insolent King... He orates like Hardelands and Sunderlands are equals,” a Hardeland princess comments.

“Let him have his moment... the rest of the day shall certainly not be kind,” her mother whispers back.

“My stomach churns. I have an awful feeling about this union,” a Sunderland Royal laments.

“Isn’t it obvious? Our lives are about to change forever,” her husband counters.

“What if this change assumes a doomful form and our freedom is rendered a tale of yore? King Eli is clever; I dare say he’s planning something behind the scenes,” the woman puts across.

“Well... let’s leave that to the gambits of time and enjoy our meal while it’s hot,” the husband insouciantly helps himself to a large chunk of mutton.

“...and with this we’re assured the friendships and alliances of the Shuddalands shall know no disruptions in the ages to come. Thank you all.” King Erod concludes his speech, after which they grace the half-genuine ambience with emotionally-porous rounds of applause.

Osculan, once again, punches the aisle with his ungainly steps. More elated than ever, he cannot wait to see how this goes.

“We’ve come to the main juncture, as the Prince of Sunderlands is about to kiss his bride. But before then, he has to actually see her...” the clueless Sunderlandians laugh at the “joke”; Osculan smirks, preparing his eyes for the impending entertainment.

“And now... I have the honor of presenting the Grand Commander of the Shuddalands, King Eli Gethro, who holds the hand of his winsome angel, Princess Phoebe of Harde...” Osculan’s encomium is interrupted with clashes of yawps and shrieks – the bride has been revealed – and it’s no bride!

Fibelle and Zabelle cannot exactly claim to be novices at underthinking the torture of external reactions – it just surprises them, month after month, that their father has not drawn the curtain on his quest to get them a husband whose entire kindred is not plagued with blindness. They are the Siamese twins of Hardelands: not many are permitted to see them, as they are abhorrently frightening. The few who know them call them the Monsters of Hardelands – except of course King Eli, who has reached a conspicuous point of desperation in attempting to force the wedding bells. The bells do ring... right before they quell into an angry silence...

“How dare you Eli?! You entice me into signing a do-or-die contract, and alas, it is but a ploy to marry my boy off to... abominations!” King Erod storms up from his seat, flouncing toward him in irate bitterness.

“That is no way to speak of my daughters!” King Eli fires back.

“You call these daughters? Your oblivion gets you sicker and sicker in that pompous head of yours... to the point that you defraud innocent Kingdoms and insult us with despicable monsters!” King Erod rants.