

Toothed and Thorny

by Elizabeth Kate Switaj

Cliffs are not all I've known, but I've seen them every day since I came to light. When I first broke out of the shell that protected me from feet and poisons, I pushed my way into darkness. It was soil. I could not have survived if it was light, and when I surfaced there was only gray. One day the foot traffic would teach me to call that color fog, but all I understood at first was its sensation—wavelength and chill.

When the fog is gone, the people come. I don't know what they see in that row of sharp drops down to the sea. Shale and sandstone. Puffins, gulls, and guillemots. Isn't that what the world's made of? My world must be rarer than I am. The visitors stare at waves—and the rocks and the birds that rise from them. Only one woman ever stopped for me and my purple.

She flattened herself down to my level and photographed me. I fear I was just foreground to portraiture of cliffs, but it was something. I tried to follow her, but my roots would not lift. I never saw her again; I never see anyone again except the people who pick up trash, and I give them no more attention than anybody gives to me. Except that one woman. Perhaps.

