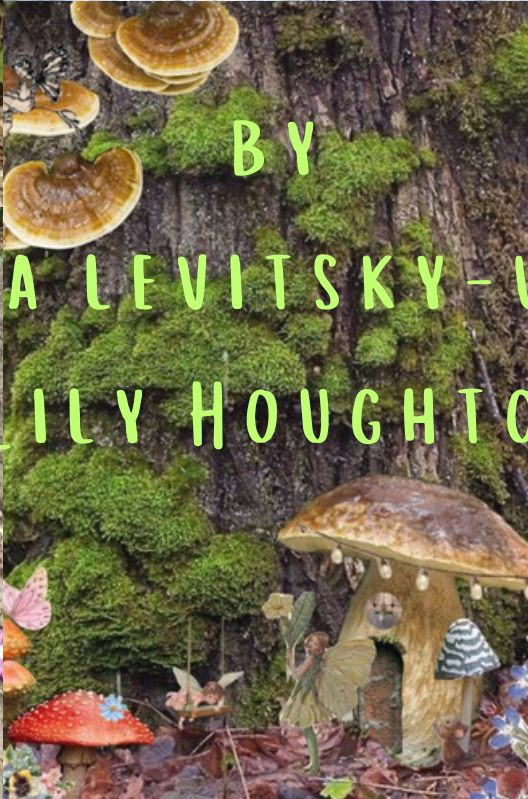


FIREANTS



BY
SOFYA LEVITSKY-WEITZ
LILY HOUGHTON

CHARACTERS:

CLEMENTINE - late 20s, a writer on strike having a crisis of imagination

LYDIA - 60s/70s - lived in this town her whole life, retired, lives a quiet life, built a “fairy land” collection of items and things in the land next to her house

SETTING:

A town in Upstate New York containing a mix of gentrification of youth and people who have been there awhile, renters and owners, people moving fast and people moving slowly.

RELENTLESS

A town in Upstate New York. The outside of a house, eclectic and nostalgic. It's clear someone's lived here a long time and put care into it. Next to the house is a field - wild and full of plants and weeds. Among them, a collection of curated knick knacks, small figurines, items, objects, etc. A "fairy land" of sorts that someone clearly put a lot of effort put into.

CLEMENTINE crouches in the field, seemingly talking to herself, quietly, picking up the figurines, moving them around, totally transfixed and charmed.

She's so focused that she doesn't notice when LYDIA exits her house, spotting Clementine, and walking up to her, until Lydia is standing right next to her.

LYDIA

Hello?

Clementine jumps.

CLEMENTINE

Oh my god

They stare at each other until Clementine slowly rises.

CLEMENTINE

I'm...sorry

LYDIA

(tilting her head)

What are you sorry about?

Clementine looks around, bereft.

CLEMENTINE

I'm -

I'm sorry that my days seem to just disappear
that -

I do yoga

or make a snack

or do my laundry

or talk at length with my cat (Buttons)
or stare at photos on my phone of when I used to like my hair cut

I'm sorry that because of all of that
or in spite of all that?
I can't seem to make anything meaningful at all

*Lydia starts to adjust some of the tiny figurines. Clementine
watches, nervous.*

LYDIA

All of that seems meaningful
except the staring at photos of when you used to like your haircut, maybe

Clementine shakes her head.

CLEMENTINE

No - uh - I guess what I meant is
this is your house, right?
(pointing to the house)
So this is your - uh, field, I'm assuming?
with all of these amazing little things
which means I'm trespassing

LYDIA

This is my house
and yes this is mine, too
as much as anything wild can be anyone's
(beat)
but you don't care about that, do you?
as a government official

Clementine is shocked.

CLEMENTINE

A government -
I am *not* a government official
you think *I'm* -
I'm wearing a cute thrift store outfit
Look at my choker!
Also -

I don't even have a clipboard

Lydia eyes her skeptically.

LYDIA

So what are you doing here?

CLEMENTINE

I - uh

Clem starts to wander a bit, admiring all the little objects.

CLEMENTINE

Well

I've passed this field a few times
on my way to the organic market?
the one up the road?

With the large tomatoes?

I'm renting a house here for -

well as long as things are frozen

you know, after years of being frozen in a different way

but now they're frozen-frozen

LYDIA

I'm not sure I know what you mean

CLEMENTINE

You haven't seen the news?

LYDIA

I don't watch the news

CLEMENTINE

That's probably for the best

(beat)

Well anyway

I saw all the little worlds over here

and honestly?

It looked like it was scooped right out of my child-mind

just

made real

and so I just - I don't know
I was compelled and
came over here
(beat, almost ashamed)
I'm trying to think of ideas

LYDIA
Ideas for what?

CLEMENTINE
Exactly.

Clementine sits again, despondent. Lydia just looks at her.

CLEMENTINE
I think I'm sick

LYDIA
You look fine to me

CLEMENTINE
Sick like
can't think of things
Sick like
I can only think about making what's sell-able
til my brain turns to mush

Clementine stands up, definitively.

CLEMENTINE
I was wondering if I should maybe go to a uh... a hospital?
But my therapist told me she didn't think I needed that.
She said I didn't need to go to a mental ward, I just needed to go to law school.
Or something.

LYDIA
Law school?
This is why I've never gone to / therapy

CLEMENTINE
Yes, she said that I am very good at convincing myself of things that aren't real.

So maybe I would be good at convincing a jury
you know, in a case

LYDIA

She thinks you are a good liar?

(laughing)

Your therapist thinks you are a good liar.

CLEMENTINE

NO.

No, no, you are taking the wrong message away from this.

I am a...Storyteller.

LYDIA

That isn't unique.

Anyone can be a storyteller.

Anyone can tell a story.

Clementine is hurt by this.

CLEMENTINE

(pouting)

Fine.

Why don't *you* tell *me* a story, then?

A beat.

Lydia thinks for a second.

LYDIA

Alright.

(beat)

Every house is a haunted house, she thought. Your house is haunted by everything that happened there. The sky blue you tried to paint the walls and gave up halfway. The room you whispered to yourself, *I am no longer in love with who I thought I would love forever*. The kitchen island you knocked down but still edge around like it's there. Your own ghost haunts your house, and it always will. Worst of all, your house is haunted by everything that didn't happen there but could've. She thought: Tomorrow, I'll make sun tea. Tomorrow, I'll be the type of woman who puts tea bags in the glass pitcher, fills it with cool tap water, closes the lid, sets it out in the sun. Tomorrow, she thought, I'll be the type of woman who calls her sister and doesn't pick a fight. Tomorrow, I'll look up what the type of bird it is who calls out every afternoon. I'll be the type of woman who sticks up for herself, not just in her own head, but in real life. I'll stick up for what I've built. I won't just think

it's over because someone tells me it's over. I'll be the type of woman, she thought, who types up a petition, gets the neighbors to sign it, marches down to the city, and tells them they can't destroy my world, this little something I created, filled with things that make me feel whole. Not without a fight, at least. Tomorrow.

Clementine stares at Lydia for awhile. Then, can't help herself -

CLEMENTINE

Okay, that was interesting
and like - lyrical, totally
I loved the personal connection (I'm assuming here)
but - what's the payoff?
the stakes for the main character?
and can we lean into the comedic piece, it seems sort of dreary
people love comedy these days
and I think it could use a big set piece, just to ground it

Lydia gives her a look.

LYDIA

What the hell are you talking about

Clementine shakes her head and starts pacing around.

CLEMENTINE

I told you
I'm sick
(beat, realizing)
But wait
is that true?
they're trying to destroy this place?
Is that why you thought I was a government official?

LYDIA

Yes
It's "based on a true story"

CLEMENTINE

But why?

LYDIA

To build some big highway
they've been trying for years

CLEMENTINE

(impassioned)

We can't let that happen!
We have to stop it!

LYDIA

It's too late

CLEMENTINE

It's not!

We're here!

Look!

(excited)

What if we option the life rights of...

She scrambles, grabs two random figurines.

These two figurines!

LYDIA

What?

CLEMENTINE

It would make great IP

LYDIA

(skeptical)

I don't -

CLEMENTINE

Listen

if we think of the perfect pitch

we could get the money

and save this place!

LYDIA

You want to—

Sell the life rights of my garden?

In order to save it?

CLEMENTINE

Yes! Look, the foundation is all there.
A classic David and Goliath story.
A hero's journey—

LYDIA

But, if you sell the magic of this place
Give it away
Isn't that just another way to destroy it?
(beat)
Just another type of highway?

Clementine thinks on this. She pivots her pitch.

CLEMENTINE

Okay what if
What if it isn't about the garden?
We just sell a really good pitch
And use the money to save the garden?
To save the little world.

LYDIA

Alright.

CLEMENTINE

I have to warn you, though.
There are a lot of steps to this.
First, we need a log line. Maybe a series bible too.

LYDIA

A bible?
I'm not religious.
I would say I'm spiritual, but -

CLEMENTINE

No, it's —
Nevermind.
After that, we need to attach a production company. Preferably, a celebrity production company with a quirky name. Or, a name that has both letters *and* numbers in it. Then, we work for about a

year to perfect the pitch and adapt it to the needs of whatever star we attach it to. Like, what if they don't like the color blue? We need to change the color of the sky, then. So we do that. And then, finally, we take it out and hopefully, hopefully, hopefully sell it. Then we have about six months of contract negotiations. During these six months, we will have no income (also, we haven't made any money on this at all yet, so actually we haven't had an income for a year and a half) so maybe we should start a local honey company to sell at the market. You should start harvesting honeybees now; we're already behind schedule. When the contracts are finally set, we will get our first payment and get to writing the damn thing!

Clementine is energized.

LYDIA

Wait.

All that happens -

Before you even write?

Before you even create?

(a beat)

And aren't you getting ahead of yourself?

We don't even have a story.

Yet.

Clementine takes a big, deep breath.

CLEMENTINE

Okay. Pitch: a young woman falls in love with Chat GPT. It speaks to her in a way she finds pleasing. Twist: it turns out that Chat GPT has actually just memorized all of Ryan Gosling's personality traits, so she isn't actually in love with a computer, she is in love with Ryan Gosling. Or actually... She is in love with Chat GPT's perception of Ryan Gosling. What even is Ryan Gosling? She is in love with a faint pencil drawing of Ryan Gosling.

LYDIA

Who is that.

Do they end up together?

CLEMENTINE

Of course they don't end up together.

It's Ryan Gosling.

They have never met.

LYDIA

Can you fall in love with someone you've never met?

CLEMENTINE

I don't know.

That is poetry.

I don't do poetry anymore.

I do pitches.

But you are right.

That pitch was too meta.

It would never sell.

Okay. What if -

What if The Matrix and The Stepford Wives had a baby?

Would that be a good movie?

Is that anything?

Okay

Pivoting.

What if-

What if this gnome was married to that fairy

They have two children

One is a little duck and one is a fake flower

But what if secretly the gnome had another family

Another family with that little cat figurine over there

And they have a child too

A little round stone

But what if

What if that little round stone fell in love with the fake flower

And they wanted to get married

But didn't know they had the same father

What if-

What if there was a huge blow up at the rehearsal dinner

And they looked at each other with their jaws both dropped and were like

"DAD!"

"Wait no... that's my dad"

"Who? Who are you talking to?"

And they both point to the gnome

And realize they are half siblings.

(beat)

They would have to return all their wedding gifts

Even the little cake a fire ant made for the couple

By chewing weeds and spitting them back out into the shape of a pastry

It was beautiful

The perfect shade of green.

(beat)
When I was little
That's what I thought fairies ate.

LYDIA
You thought they ate fire ants?

CLEMENTINE
No, I thought they ate desserts prepared for them by fire ants.

LYDIA
Oh, that's a lovely thought.
However, fire ants are not kind creatures.
We had an infestation in the garden this summer
They ate all the flower petals and even got into the foundation of the house, chewing through the wires
We had to pour boiling water and vinegar all over dozens and dozens of them.

CLEMENTINE
Oh.
I grew up in the city, so I actually never saw an ant until I turned thirteen.

LYDIA
How did you believe so deeply in fairies but you had never seen the creature that prepared its food?

CLEMENTINE
(stumped)
Oh. I don't know.
I guess I used my—

LYDIA
Imagination?

CLEMENTINE
Yes. My imagination.
Well, I actually thought ants weren't real for a while.
Like mermaids or dragons or
Dinosaurs.

LYDIA
Dinosaurs were real.

Can you move your foot, please?

CLEMENTINE

Huh?

LYDIA

Your Birkenstock is squashing the—

CLEMENTINE

Oh, sorry.

Clementine lifts her Birkenstock. All she sees underneath the footprint is wet dirt.

CLEMENTINE

I don't see anything.

I don't think I damaged anything.

LYDIA

I planted seeds.

CLEMENTINE

What are you growing?

What are you trying to grow?

To bring back?

Lydia thinks for awhile. Then she sits down. Clementine sits with her. Finally:

LYDIA

Years ago, my kids moved away. You know, their bodies left. They had so much stuff, but they left. They left their stuff. All their tiny things that made them feel big. No one talks about that loss. The loss of your children, that way. When your children aren't yours anymore. You build them up just to let them go, you know, it's the same old story. We've heard it one hundred times. But even a story told 100 times can still hurt. I raised them in this house. Their childhood was a second one, for me. They don't tell you that, either. I think if you do motherhood right you are a child again. When my daughter was a baby, I used to carry her around and let her touch everything, smell everything. I'd open up the spice cabinet and take out each jar for her to smell. You know smell is our greatest recollection? I hope she picks up cinnamon in a grocery store out in Northern California and thinks of me but doesn't know why. I hope she thinks of me.

Clementine looks suddenly panicked.

CLEMENTINE

What if
What if all of this happened
And I have nothing to show for it?
I mean of course except
Fair pay and my job still existing in five years
But I mean more like -
What if I have created nothing?
I got this time
To finally create something just for me
And I can't do it
I just can't do it.
(beat)
What if I can only create for others?
Little equations for men in suits who maybe read two pages of The Bell Jar in high school.

Suddenly, Clementine is filled with fear.

What if
What if we got it all wrong?
What if slowly
But surely
They have been turning writers into computers all along?
What if there's already microchips in my brain
Telling me to make my memories more in the tone of White Lotus
I'm constantly noting myself
Through the eyes of someone I hate.

LYDIA

I didn't watch White Lotus.
I only have cable.
I don't pay for all the other bullshit.

Clementine has never been so shocked in her life.

CLEMENTINE

What -
How -
How do you -

Survive?

LYDIA

How do I survive?

I wake up.

I have breakfast.

Two hard boiled eggs with flakey salt.

I call my daughter.

I leave her a voicemail.

I go to the garden.

I water the plants.

I clean the figurines.

I plant more seeds.

I watch them grow.

A long beat.

CLEMENTINE

Does your daughter

Does your daughter ever pick up the phone?

Does she ever thank you

For this world you created?

Or is she a haunting, too?

A dial tone.

A government official.

A fire ant?

Lydia spots something in the weeds. She becomes angry.

LYDIA

God damn it!

They're back.

One second—

Lydia storms into her house to get something. Clementine stands alone. The lights shift. Suddenly, we are in the world Lydia has created. The GNOME and the LITTLE DUCK figurine are in mid-conversation. (The actor playing Clementine plays Gnome and the actor playing Lydia plays Little Duck.)

GNOME

Have you ever seen The Stepford Wives?

LITTLE DUCK

The original or the Nicole Kidman one?

GNOME

The original.

LITTLE DUCK

Oh, I've only seen the Nicole Kidman one.

They play it on cable all the time.

I only have cable.

GNOME

Oh.

I'm starting to get worried.

Very worried.

That they are going to destroy the world we created.

Well, that she created

That we reside in.

LITTLE DUCK

Yes, I am worried too.

I hope she pours more boiling water and vinegar on them soon.

GNOME

Me too. Although, I did not enjoy the smell last time.

What do we do?

Do we just sit and wait for it to happen?

LITTLE DUCK

Yes

don't you think sitting and waiting for something

is where everything begins?

LITTLE DUCK and GNOME start to feel water poured on them - it's not harsh, more like a pleasant little rainstorm. They revel in it. They love it. The fire ants are being washed away. Lights brighten til we can't see anything at all.

The end.