Hi, my name is Vanessa Veselka, and I'm going to read to you from my new novel, *The Great Offshore Grounds*.

**Book 1—Henry Hudson**

*Health to buzzards  
Cash to the drivers  
Euler for the lords  
An’ Greasy luck to the lifers!*

**The Wedding**

Fifteen miles south of Seattle and halfway across Puget Sound to the west is Maury Island. Shaped like an arrowhead aimed at the mainland, green as the inner fold of a grass blade, it can be seen from the air cradled in the crook of an elbow of water. Tourists ride over on ferries to watch for whales and UFOs. Jets turn around overhead on their final approach to the airport. Even on days when there is no rain, mist filters through the evergreens until it pulls apart like threadbare cloth and burns off.

The wedding was to be held in the afternoon at Point Robinson, the site of an old fog-signal station that once housed a steam whistle fed by coal re and water to warn away ships. In 1897, at the dawn of massive capital expansion and speculation, the whistle sounded for five hundred and twenty-eight hours, nearly killing the man who had to shovel the thirty-five tons of coal. The cargo had to be kept from the rocks, but who can halt the lumbering desires of the world?

In 1915, the lighthouse with its state-of-the-art, fifth-order Fresnel lens was built. Powered initially by oil vapor lamps, its beacon could be seen for twelve miles. The lens was the perfect manifestation of Victorian technology, replacing simple at lenses with faceted, crystal domes, prisms cut into tiers that made it both astonishingly beautiful and a breakthrough in optics. The Fresnel lens had a theoretically infinite capacity to capture di use light and, by way of internal reflection, cast it like a spear through darkness. It lit stages and celluloid, Polaroid shots and retinas for ID scans, and on Point Robinson, it lit Puget Sound.

These days, every modern ship has a GPS and the little lighthouse is just a decoration on a brochure, a destination for a grade-school field trip. The mechanisms that rotated the original lantern remain on the first floor, which is now a tiny museum of technology.
with gauges and wheels and iron bolted into the base with lines that lead nowhere and do nothing.

Back across the sound in Seattle, Livy looked out the window of her basement apartment. Her father was getting married that afternoon, and though it was already late April, a cold, wet breeze still whistled through the gaps in the caulking turning her skin to goose-flesh. A few feet away stood her sister, Cheyenne, poorly slept but already dressed.

“I’m freezing,” said Cheyenne. “I’m turning on the space heater.”

“Turn on the oven. They charge us for electricity,” Livy said. Cheyenne rolled her eyes but went over to the little white gas stove. Cranking the temperature to broil, she leaned back against the oven door so she could feel the heat on her hamstrings while the oven warmed.

Yesterday they’d spent the whole day picking rocks out of Livy’s landlord’s garden in trade for a patch of soil near the sunny side of the fence so that Livy could grow food. It wasn’t political. Livy didn’t care about pesticides or permaculture. She was just the cheapest person Cheyenne had ever known. She lived off past-date groceries. She washed her clothes once a month with a teaspoon of dish soap in a tub. She made her own bras. Cheyenne was pretty sure she would have rinsed and reused dental dams if she thought it would work. Recently, Livy had become convinced she could feed herself on three square yards of land. It was ridiculous, but since Cheyenne had appeared out of nowhere and moved in on her without warning or rent, she didn’t have much of a say.

Taller and unfreckled, Cheyenne had chosen a rose-colored capped-sleeve shirt with eyelets and a pair of black pinstriped suit pants. She could pass in the crowd they’d be in today. Her second-hand clothes came off as vintage, while her misadventures in body art made her seem a fine vase, badly cracked and chipping but a gritty accent to any room.

“Cyril didn’t come to my wedding,” Cheyenne said. “Why should I go to his?”

“Did you invite him?”

“Hell no. He would have arrived like a lord and expected to walk me down the aisle. Here. Let me give you away. Oh hey Dad, I’m pretty sure you did that.”

“You’re right. He would have,” said Livy.

“So why are we even going?”

“I have a day off work and it’s cheaper than a movie. I’m tired of ramen and hot dogs and there’ll be rich-people food so I’m taking Tupperware.”

“Please don’t make it obvious,” said Cheyenne. “We’re already going to look so out of place.”
“Because you have jailhouse tats of hearts and clubs on your knuckles? Or because I don’t shave and look like a landscaper?”

Cheyenne spread the fingers of her left hand. “Not just clubs and hearts. The one on my thumb is a diamond and the pinkie is a spade. You just can’t tell anymore.”

Livy crossed to where she’d laid out her newly washed blue painter’s pants and pulled them on over her long johns. “I’m going to the wedding because it’s a show of support that costs me nothing. I have never thought of him as a dad so I don’t care. At his worst he’s just a big blank. A disappointment. He gets a clean slate. That’s my wedding present. A pass. It’s the only decent move.”

“I shot my better angels,” said Cheyenne.

“They’re angels. You can’t kill them.”

“If they were real you could.”

Livy could feel Cheyenne’s eyes burning holes in her ribs. She zipped her fly and flattened her pockets.

“I have clothes if you want to borrow something,” said Cheyenne.

Livy froze for a second then bent down to roll the cuffs, making sure they were perfectly even on both sides and all the way around. “I have a white shirt. It has buttons. I can tuck it in,” she said.

“What do you think his bride will be like?” asked Cheyenne. “A full-blown voodoo narcissist like him.”

“He couldn’t take the competition. I predict Anglo geisha.”

“I can see that,” said Livy.

“We should at least get drunk before we go.”

“I’d rather do it on his dime,” said Livy.

“I bet inviting us isn’t even his idea. I’ll bet it’s the bride’s.” Livy smiled. “Maybe he has cancer and his doctor warned him that guilt suppresses the immune system.”

Cheyenne propelled herself off the stove with her back foot. “Yes!” she said. “No.” She held up her hand. “Wait,” she said,

“I have it. He found God . . . and God said unto him,” Cheyenne threw her arms wide and boomed, “Stop being such a dick! A dick, a dick, dick . . . echo, echo, echo . . .”

Neither sister had seen their father since they were fourteen. The wedding invitation had arrived only two weeks before the date of the ceremony, just on the heels of
Cheyenne’s reappearance, something their mother, Kirsten, considered prophetic. It was obvious from the short window that the decision to include them was, at best, the result of a long debate or, at worst, an afterthought. Their initial instinct had been to ignore it and the invitation was repurposed as a coaster for days before it was seriously considered. But in the end they could not ignore it. It tapped at a hidden door . . . *Shh . . . he is a king in a castle; he has only stashed us away in the village to keep us safe; someday he will call for us, claim us, and make everything right.*

“I kind of understand why we’re going to the wedding,” said Cheyenne, “but why is Mom going?”

“For her own reasons.”

“Without a doubt.”

Livy’s eyes met Cheyenne’s for a second then moved to the clock.

“What time is Mom picking you up?” she asked.

A car honked outside. “Now,” said Cheyenne.

Kirsten’s twenty-year-old Toyota was stopped in the middle of the street with the hazards on blocking half the road. She was wearing a black velvet camisole with a long black skirt and black cardigan. There was a ring on every finger and totemic silver jewelry hung around her neck. Tiny zircon studs pierced the indigo blue sun and the crescent moon tattooed on her earlobes. Cheyenne took one look at her and knew that her mother was totally prepared to make an awkward situation more awkward.

“Get in or we’ll miss the ferry,” said Kirsten. The dashboard of Kirsten’s car rattled with the engine.

“Keep the window rolled down,” she said. “The defroster doesn’t work.”

Kirsten and Cheyenne hadn’t spent any time alone since Cheyenne returned so Cheyenne had agreed they would go out to the wedding together, while Livy rode in with their brother, Essex. The minute Cheyenne got into the car, though, she regretted it. Kirsten had questions. About Cheyenne’s failed marriage. About its after-math. About Cheyenne’s spiritual analysis of this moment in her life. Cheyenne tried to change the subject to one of Kirsten’s many interests—domestic violence legislation, her coven, what books she was reading—but it always turned back to Cheyenne’s psyche and the archetypal trauma that must be feeding her cycles of disintegration. Cheyenne told her mother she was tired and pretended to sleep but Kirsten talked anyway.

“You’re a mystic by nature,” Kirsten said as they drove onto the ferry. “You’re drawn to shadowlands.”

Cheyenne rolled over and fell into a deeper fake nap.