

The background of the cover is a photograph of a natural rock archway made of reddish-brown sandstone. A river flows through the arch, and three hikers with backpacks are wading across it. The sky is blue with some clouds. The overall scene is a desert landscape with some green trees and shrubs near the river.

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The Magazine

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-39-
Best Kept
Secrets
in our
National
Parks

WONDER LANDS

JULY 2016

Meet the people behind this issue.



Brooke Jarvis

WRITER

A Walk in the Park / p. 58

Brooke chronicles the behind-the-scenes work that constitutes the backbone of our national parks. "Seattle, where I live, is supremely lucky to be smack in the middle of three national parks: Rainier, Olympic, and North Cascades. It's impossible to pick a favorite, but in Olympic you can go from snowy peaks and alpine meadows to temperate rain forest and tidal pools. There's no place like it."

[@BROOKEJARVIS](#)

[@BROOKEEILEENJARVIS](#)



Eva Holland

WRITER

The Promise / p. 70

Eva's moving piece comes from a recent trip to several national parks, including Arches. "It can be a tough place to find solitude. But on my last visit, I discovered the Devils Garden Primitive Loop, where I found my way through a gorgeous sandstone maze."

[@EVAHOLLAND](#)



Alex Green

ILLUSTRATOR

A Walk in the Park; The Promise / p. 58, 70

Alex's art brings forth the depth of rich experiences made available by our national parks. "When looking at any given subject, I try to decipher order in a world which seems chaotic. I find there can be beauty in almost anything if you look close enough."

[@ALEXGREENDRAWS](#)



Marina Muun

ILLUSTRATOR

The Marble Connection / p. 51

Marina attempts to convey complexity with conceptual solutions. "In my work, I always try to find an underlying thread—an emotion or a feeling—that will anchor the image. Often this is a bit vague, or too complicated to put into words, but lends itself well to visual language."

[@MARINAMUUN](#)



Wendy Lewis

WRITER

The Marble Connection / p. 51

Wendy reflects on her unusual path to self-discovery after moving to Providence. Her favorite spots in the city: "Don't miss the Rhode Island School of Design Museum or, for great Latin food, Los Andes Restaurant."



The Marble Connection

Sometimes the fastest way to someone's heart is to turn to stone.

/ BY WENDY LEWIS

IN 2004, at the tail end of a decade-long relationship, I transplanted myself from New York City to Rhode Island. Intrigued with the culture of my new home state, I spent hours alone at WaterFire Providence, an outdoor evening event where hundreds of small, fragrant bonfires burn in braziers along the banks of the river. I liked WaterFire and its downtown street festival vibe, but what kept me coming back were the gargoyles.

On most WaterFire nights, street performers in elaborate theater makeup and costumes appeared as living white marble statues and gargoyles at the base of the city's World War I monument. Perched atop marble-painted wood platforms, the chalky statues blended with the backdrop of the silvery-gray monument as if carved from the same stone. Next to each statue stood a matching column with a narrow opening in the top. A dollar donation in the column would bring the statue to life and buy you an inspiring fortune or a riddle on a brightly colored paper scroll. Moving slowly and gracefully, the statue would break her pose, grandly retrieve the scroll from a pouch, and gently place it in your hand as if delivering

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priceless words from the heavens.

One to three gargoyles, also on platforms, always flanked the statues like gothic bodyguards. Charcoal gray and eerie, their bodies contrasted with the monument stone and the divine presence of the statues. As the gargoyles moved lithely under the nighttime lighting, their masked faces morphed from grotesque grimaces to mischievous

It would hold my gaze as if pondering its own reflection. It understood me. It was magic.

grins. The gargoyles were spooky when still, but playful when approached. Surprised youngsters would often squeal with delight when the gargoyles touched their hair with their long, slender fingers.

I'd find a good spot and sit quietly for an hour or two, mesmerized by the gargoyles as I processed my breakup. Their melancholic beauty seemed to embody my pain and their slow movements, my lethargy. When I felt ready, I'd take a deep breath, climb the monument steps, stuff my own dollar in the gargoyle's column, and bask in the circle of its mysterious gray spell. Sometimes it would touch my hair or face, sometimes not. But always it would hold my gaze, wordlessly and thoughtfully, as if pondering its own reflection. It understood me. It was magic.

On a spring day eight years later, the magic of the gargoyles and statues entered my life again. Healed from my old relationship but bored with my office job, I



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trolled internet job postings during my lunch break and noticed an audition announcement from TEN31 Productions—the company whose name I'd seen on the back of the statues' scrolls.

I impulsively emailed a few pictures of myself along with a long, passionate fan letter and a plea for an audition. They'd requested an acting resume, but I had no performance experience since my sixth-grade production of *Oklahoma!*

As soon as I hit "send," I regretted it. I'm 43—too old, I thought. Their performers are probably all college drama students. But to my amazement, two days later I received a reply with an audition time for the following week.

I arrived at my audition nervous, sweaty, and cursing myself for applying. I was easily the oldest hopeful there. But when my name was called and I met the company's creators—the original gargoyles—excitement powered me through my audition. I must have impressed them with my tai chi-inspired impressions of a living statue, because in another two days I learned I'd made the cut.

Incredulous, I basked in my success and the congratulations of friends, even as a darker concern loomed. As a spectator, I'd enjoyed the magic of the characters. But once I'd learned the behind-the-scenes logistics, would it destroy the mystery?

My trial performance was as a bronze statue, not at WaterFire but up Interstate 95 at Faneuil Hall Marketplace in downtown Boston. Patrick, another performer, was assigned as my producer. He helped me prepare for the three-hour gig in a quiet corner of an adjoining parking garage. After I applied opaque golden-bronze makeup to my face, neck, and hands, Patrick helped me into my matching costume: a long-sleeved, long-skirted, brown cotton pilgrim outfit with a bonnet. It was



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a sunny, 92-degree July day and I envisioned both myself and the costume melting in the heat.

I also feared that my foray into "living the magic" would be a dismal failure. As Patrick led me out of the cool shade of the garage and I stepped slowly in my chocolate-brown pilgrim shoes through the gawking throngs, Patrick casually mentioned that he'd recently assisted another new performer who, 15 minutes into her gig, stepped down off the platform and swore off performing forever.

Patrick helped me step onto the platform. While I assumed my most statuesque pilgrim pose, intrigued onlookers formed a semicircle. Gazing into the small crowd, I recalled standing on my grammar school stage as cowgirl No. 12 on opening night of Oklahoma! and peering with awe and fear at the sea of parents' faces in the school auditorium. Like then, there was no turning back.

In my bronze pilgrim hand, I held a large hollowed-out book, also painted bronze, filled with bright blue paper fortunes. A little boy, urged by his father, stepped into the semicircle, shyly approached my platform, and cautiously inserted a dollar into my tip column. Recalling the grace of the marble WaterFire statues, I smoothly opened the book, retrieved a fortune, and placed it gently into his little hand. He gasped and stared into my face, wide-eyed, his expression an endearing blend of joy, wonder, and disbelief; the statue had moved! He ran to his father, clutching the scroll like a prize. I resumed my pose, locked eyes with the boy's father, and winked. The man exploded with laughter. I was hooked.

That afternoon I handed out countless more scrolls to other shy kids, curious adults, and bemused tourists. I ignored the rivulets of sweat that tickled my



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skin. Couples debated if I was real or if I was breathing. A teenage girl timidly squeezed my bronzed hand. When I squeezed back, she ran to her friends, laughing and shrieking. A drunken man tried to put a used tissue in my book. Patrick chased him off. People stared. Kids pointed. I posed for pictures. And through it all, the magic flowed.

At the end of the shift, Patrick helped me off the platform, back to the parking lot, and out of my costume. The shorts and sports top I'd worn underneath were soaked with salty sweat. I was physically drained but strangely energized. I drove home blasting dance music and singing, and even after a cool, soothing shower at home, I couldn't calm down. It was as if the cover of my pilgrim book was the lid of Pandora's Box, and I had unknowingly opened a direct portal to the mysterious source of the magic. I lay awake most of that night smiling, eager for my next gig.

I've since performed at dozens of public and private events as many different characters, but WaterFire, where I discovered the statues and gargoyles, is still one of my favorite venues.

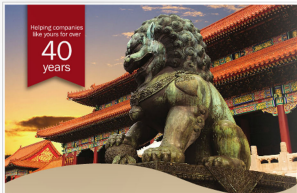
One summer WaterFire evening, I performed as a white marble statue of the Roman goddess Minerva, handing out riddles from my marble-painted canvas pouch. From the dropping temperatures and thinning crowd, I knew it was almost time to wrap for the night. A woman approached my platform, alone. Small and plain, she was unremarkable except for a palpable misery that seemed to burden her steps and dim her face. She slowly inserted a dollar into my column and I grandly delivered the riddle, as usual. But she lingered, pressing the small blue paper between her palms like a child praying. Looking up at me, her eyes filled with tears as she implored, "Will this help me solve

the riddle of my life?"

I spread my arms wide, slowly reached for her, and gently held her head in my hands. At my touch, she began sobbing. We stood together for a minute, her forehead just inches from my elaborate headdress, she releasing her tears and I holding the space for her to do so. When she caught her breath, I lifted her chin, looked in her eyes, and blew a kiss. Then I crossed my hands

over my heart and opened them to her. I love you, I gestured. I recognize your pain. It's going to be okay. The woman deeply inhaled and gratefully whispered, "Thank you. Thank you." I continued gesturing and waving as she slowly walked away, glancing back over her shoulder, clutching the riddle to her chest.

Wendy Lewis is a writer based in Providence, Rhode Island.



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Dear Editor,

"The Promise" (July 2016) came at a time when I needed it most. I was returning home after being with my daughter, and when I opened the magazine, there was the story. My return to California was both to go home, and to say goodbye to my foster mother (adopted by me), who filled the love gap for those who didn't have the love they deserved as children or young adults. Just when I needed the encouragement to deal with the situation, I read "The Promise." Two hours after arriving at the hospital, I was privileged to be at her bedside for her last moments. Thank you for providing such support.

Elzetta Southworth-Coley
WARNER SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

/We're glad that Eva Holland's story about scattering her mother's ashes in Canyonlands National Park could help a little, Elzetta. May your life continue to be filled with love.

A STATUE'S HUG

On a recent flight, I read "The Marble Connection" by Wendy Lewis (July 2016). I found it admirable that she would take the risk she did at that vulnerable point in her life. I found myself on the verge of tears as I read about the lady who approached her at the end of the article. I've received similar support at several points in my life, but have also had the honor of being able to help others who have come across my path. The article brought home how much we all need each other and how important it is that more of us take an outward step to help others. Thank you for printing such an inspiring story.

Charles Sampler
CUMMINGS, GEORGIA

/Wendy played a living statue of Minerva at WaterFire Providence, an outdoor evening event. For the schedule, see waterfire.org.