

## Carnival

Her husband never wanted to display their boys like that, but Mama Sylph, she didn't mind. She was a smart woman, always looking for the quickest way to make the most honest buck. Honest was the key word. Mama Sylph was a good, Christian woman. She didn't believe in selling her body, or her boys' body, for that matter. She was adamant about this, but when the head carnie came asking about the Sylph boys, she listened carefully. She told the head carnie they were a good, Christian family, one who didn't believe in selling their bodies, that was prostitution. But the head carnie said he certainly didn't believe in prostitution either, that the carnival was, in its own very special way, a good, Christian organization. She had it all wrong, the whole world had it wrong, and it was her duty as a good, Christian woman to be understanding.

Mama Sylph wasn't easily fooled, but she listened as carefully as she could, digressing from the truth with small liberties until she believed the carnival offered a space to display her boys, her very special boys, as nature's, no, God's artwork. Mama Sylph listened until words like freak and sideshow dissolved. Her boys were unique sculptures, each detail added by God Himself, but she didn't let the head carnie take her boys away. No, even though they needed the money, Mama Sylph didn't bend. She stayed strong.

Years later, months after Papa Sylph injected air into his veins, she reconsiders the carnival. She remembers the way the carnie man talked, how his voice was melted sugar, and then.

## Water World

A long time ago, long before man walked, the earth was a sphere of solid liquid. Above, the atmosphere existed as it does today, only cleaner, much cleaner. The surface of the water did not splash waves because there was nothing for the water to collide with except air. A long time ago, the ocean was so clear that man flying in the air could see directly through the water, straight to the other side of the planet, except back then, man had horrible vision. Only the rare, exceptional man could even see the surface of the water because her eyes were so small. As such, man was forced to rely on her other senses, such as memory, kindness, and dream interpretation.

There was, in fact, a fairly extensive period of time, approximately an era or two before the Evolutionary Revolution, when man could hardly open her eyelids out of sensitivity to hydrogen. The moment she opened her eyes, they would sear with such ferocity that as a sub-species, man decided to never use her eyes again. As such, men would flap their little red wings to stay as stationary as possible while friends used strands of hair and mucous to seal the eyes shut.

It is said man started using her eyes again when a young girl named Emily heard the song of a merman twinkling from the surface of the water. She'd never dreamt of him before. She had no memory of his voice, but his song contained such sadness that out of kindness, she pried her eyes open with the tips of her talons, using all the force she could, and from those eyes, she saw deep into the ocean, deep into the most tortured song.

## Opened Eyes

Emily's eyes, being unaccustomed to hydrogen, crackled, but she was unafraid. Her eyes, being unaccustomed to wind and sight, automatically barricaded themselves behind moist lids, behind darkness, but she, being the bravest of men, was determined to maintain strength.

It is said the merman's song seeped its melody deep into her liver, where all impurities are filtered, and the contamination of her body by his song made her pry her eyes open with her toes, and when her eyes opened and she could finally see, she fell deep into the merman's song. It is said she was the first to fall, but this cannot be substantiated. Although she is the first recorded man to be lured by a merman's song, oral stories offer many more examples of men who have ripped cement from their eyes, begging other men to bite off the seal, so they could finally see what kind of being created melodies of such penetrating sadness.

It is said mermen dream only in shadow and light. Shapes are never definitive and sound is muted. It is said mermen actively chose to dream this way. Mermen were particularly divisive and because they knew man above the water could not see but relied solely on her other senses, mermen created dreams man above water could not navigate. It was a strategic move.

The day Emily divided the atmosphere, falling freely, hydrogen cutting her freshly opened eyes, she was unafraid. She somehow knew she would survive, that in the water, her eyes would no longer hurt, that his

song would always be near, and even though she, our young heroine, wasn't frightened, we know better. We know that even though she's strong and unafraid, she ought to be. Yes, she should have known better, and even now, even now as she's sinking lower than man has sunk since they lived under water, she should know better than to think she can still be a heroine, but she doesn't.