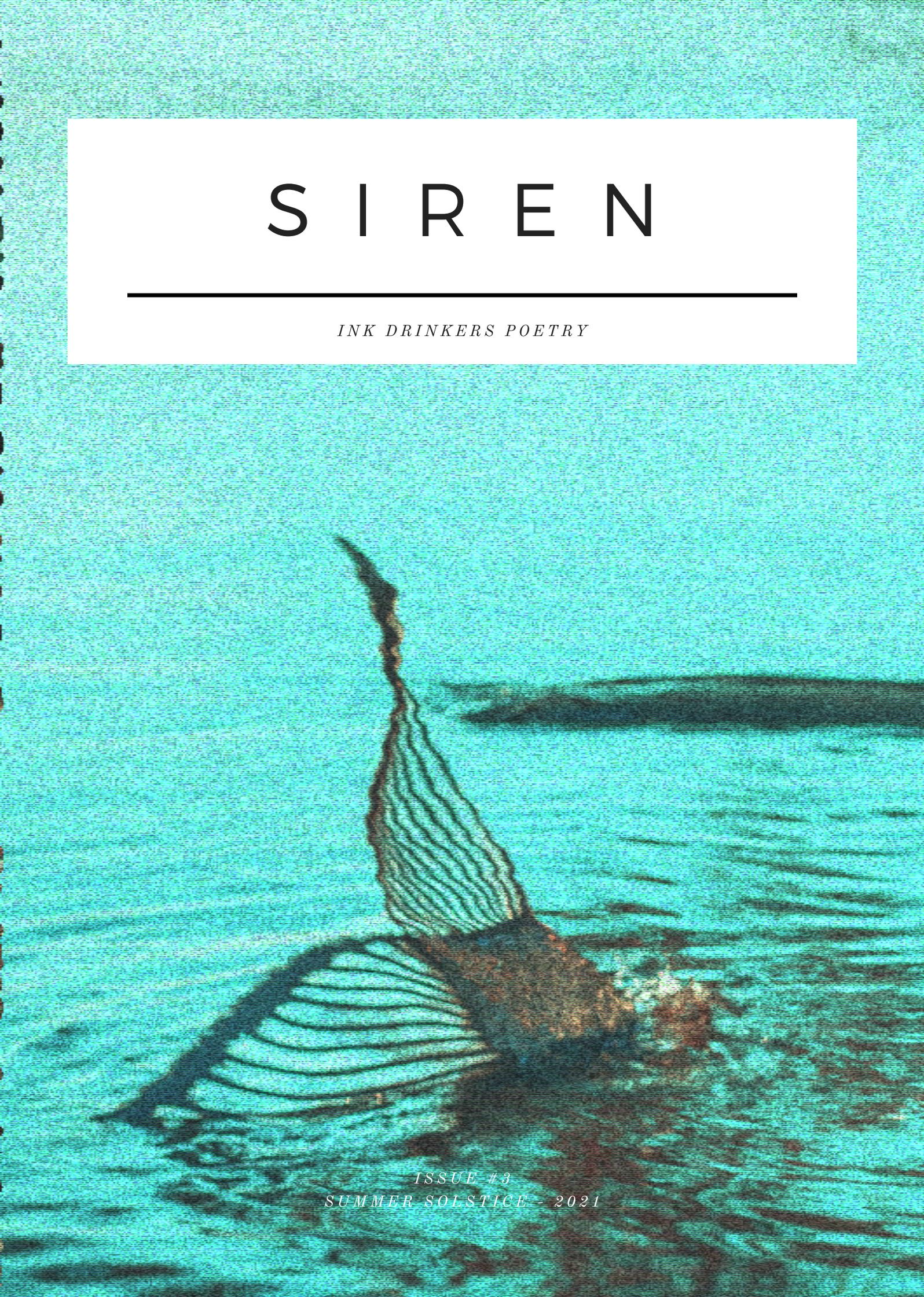


SIREN

INK DRINKERS POETRY



*ISSUE #3
SUMMER SOLSTICE - 2021*

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Blessed Solstice, you wonderful drinkers of ink, and welcome to Issue #3! I hope you are all enjoying the brightest day of the year. Outside my window, it feels like the whole world is lush and green, and absolutely buzzing with life. Watching fledglings learn to fly has become my pastime, lately, and it has given me so much joy.

Having had 'siren' as an issue for this theme has brought me more submissions than ever, and such a diverse lot! Many of the writers for this issue have written on the sea-creature side of the theme – and this is in no way a complaint. Everyone has managed to do something different with the idea of sirens, and I have fallen in love with every single poem in the issue.

I would also like to thank everyone for their patience as I accidentally got the twitter locked right before the submission deadline. Technology has never been my friend, and while I have (largely) been able to hide that from you, fate was not on my side this time.

As you may have noticed, I've decided to keep the longer submissions period. This does mean I have less time between submissions deadline and issue publishing, which has also meant I couldn't offer feedback due to the sheer volume of submissions this time, but my plan for the next submissions window is to check the form responses once a week and respond to any in there. That way, you get to know my decision more quickly and I get to take my time to write feedback on your work.

There will be a poll out shortly for the autumn equinox submissions theme, drawn of my favourites from the suggestions. This of course calls for a small shout-out to whichever dedicated fan keeps suggesting 'Thomas the Tank Engine' every time I open this submissions box. You know who you are – and I know who you are – and it does make me laugh every time I see it.

Enjoy the summer, dear friends, and enjoy these poems.

CTM

x

CONTRIBUTORS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE

CHELLA COURINGTON – SHIPWRECKED

Chella Courington (she/they) is a writer and teacher whose poetry and fiction appear in numerous anthologies and journals including SmokeLong Quarterly, Gargoyle, and Los Angeles Review. With three chapbooks of flash fiction and six of poetry, she recently published a novella-in-flash, *Adele and Tom: The Portrait of a Marriage* (Breaking Rules Publishing), featured at Vancouver Flash Fiction. A Pushcart, Best Small Fictions, and Best of the Net Nominee, Courington was raised in the Appalachian south and now lives in California. Twitter: @chellacouringto | Instagram: @chellacourington

SIDNEY DRITZ – STANDARDIZED

Sidney Dritz (she/her) is a writer in flux -- find her writing about movies and tv monthly in the Stream Queen column on @dailydrunkmag. Twitter: @sidneydritz

RICK HOLLON – EOCENE SEA SCENE

Rick Hollon (they/fey) is a nonbinary intersex writer, editor, and parent from the American Midwest. Feir work has appeared or is forthcoming in several small-press publications, including perhappened, (mac)ro(mic), Sledgehammer Lit, and Prismatic. Twitter: @SailorTheia

SARAH WALLIS – MY ATHENA

Sarah Wallis (she/her) is a poet and playwright based in Scotland, UK. In the last year work has appeared at Trampset, Lunate, Abridged and Finished Creatures, with recent work at Coffin Bell and One Art. A chapbook, *Medusa Retold*, is available from @fly_press. Twitter: @wordweave

JULIAN BRASINGTON – TRYST

Julian Brasington lives in North Wales. His poems have appeared recently in Stand, Ink Sweat & Tears, Channel, Dust, Dreich, Black Bough Poetry, and in the Morning Star newspaper. Twitter: @littorallines

ELISABETH WENIGER – TELL THE SEA I LOVE HER

Elisabeth Weniger (they/she) is an aspiring author, poet and journalist who lives in the Southern part of Germany. They are writing in both German and English. If not busy with their studies of Political Science and Sociology at university, they can usually be found working on their debut novel or taking care of horses.

KAY RITCHIE – TIGHTROPE WALKER

Kay Ritchie (she/her) grew up in Glasgow and Edinburgh, lived in London, Spain and Portugal and worked as a freelance photographer and radio producer. Published in magazines and anthologies in the UK, Ireland and Africa she has performed at events like Aye Write, Women's Aid Billion Women Rising, the Edinburgh Fringe and the Inverness Film Festival. Kay likes to dance and paint and walk. In 2019 she walked the Portuguese coastal camino from Porto to Santiago Compostela. Her poem *Tightrope Walker* has also been published in Issue 12 of Gutter.

SHINE BALLARD – SIREN

Shine Ballard (he/him), lost along the longueurs of languor, currently creates and resides on this plane(t).

Twitter: @xShine14

GUY MARTYN – WANNA MAKE YOU MINE

Guy Martyn (he/him) is a writer and Headteacher. Helped set up a Free School, but with all the best intentions. Has studied Literature, Drama, Psychology, Mysticism and Religious Experience and is training in Psychotherapy. Has work recently published in the Crank Magazine.

KAIT QUINN – YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE GOOD

Kait Quinn (she/her) is a law admin by day and a prolific poet by night. She studied creative writing at St. Edward's University in Austin, TX and her poetry has appeared in Blood Moon Journal, Polemical Zine, Chestnut Review, VERSES, and various anthologies. She is the author of the poetry collections *A Time for Winter* and *I Saw Myself Alive in a Coffin*. Kait currently lives in Minneapolis with her partner and their regal cat Spart.

Instagram: @kaitquinnpoetry

KIRSTEN LUCKINS – SONOROUS PASSAGEWAYS

Kirsten Luckins (she/her) is a writer and performer from Teesside. She is director of the Tees Women Poets collective, and project manager for the

Women Poets' Prize. Her third collection *Passerine* was published by Bad Betty in February 2021.

Twitter: @ImeldaSays | Instagram: @imelda_says

LORELEI BACHT - WHEN THE WIND BLOWS THE WATER BLACK

Lorelei Bacht (she/they) is a seahorse and a poet. Her work has appeared / is forthcoming in such publications as *Visitant*, *The Wondrous Real*, *Quail Bell*, *Abridged Magazine*, *Odd Magazine*, *Postscript*, *Strukturriss*, *The Inflectionist Review* and *Slouching Beast Journal*.

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CAITLIN UPSHALL - BEFORE ERIC

Caitlin Upshall (she/her) holds a B.A. in English from Western Washington University. Her work has been published by the *tiny journal*, *OyeDrum*, *The Sweet Tree Review*, *Entropy Magazine*, and others. In her spare time, she enjoys most things dinosaur-related and trivia nights.

Instagram: @CaitlinUpshall

MARIE-LOUISE EYRES - SIREN

ML (she/her) received her MFA in 2020. Long listed twice for the National Poetry Competition in 2020 & 2019, highly commended in the *Bridport*, shortlisted by *Live Canon & Ginkgo's AONB*. Poems in *Stand*, *Agenda*, *Portland Review*, *Iota*, *Ink Sweat & Tears*, elsewhere.

Twitter: @MaidenPoetry

ELYSSA TAPPERO - MEETING TSUNAMI

Elyssa Tappero (she/her) is a queer pagan who writes fragments of prose and poetry about mental illness, the gods, the agony of writing, and how it feels to be alive for the end of the world (which is pretty not great) in hopes of touching others who might feel the same. You can find more of her work at www.onlyfragments.com.

Twitter: @onlyfragments

Shipwrecked

I tell my lover I want to die soon
She pulls me to her
Our breastbones side by side
 She becomes a field of lavender
 crushed blooms
 a diamond in the crocus
 I long to unwrap

*

*I'm afraid I can't love afraid
if I open myself you'll hear the
Siren I am*

*

My lover says she knew we were at risk
I called myself too worn
She looked at me like a mother at her newborn
 Whispering
 between
 no past no singing

*

*I'm hurting my body a violated vow
words riddled shards of what
I desire*

*

My lover hears my song no less sad
than sweet crawls into the dark
closet with me

*

Standardized

multiple choice:

You meet her at a party and already she looks so familiar, you are sure you have met before. This means you are:

A).

a narcissist, drawn only to those like yourself.

B).

a coward, drawn to the familiar like a moth to other things moths are drawn to, because surely moths like all other things are drawn to her.

C).

clearly meant to be.

Reading comprehension:

read

the following passage, and write a brief response to the question, "In what way is the character criminally stupid?"

"October without her is not so different from October with her, just the way the trees go a cold yellow and the scabs beneath your fingernails."

Eocene Sea Scene

Inspired by K.C. Ahia

When the sea was young and clear
the walking whale was bewitched
by her own wicked father
to spend all her days aswim.
Soon her legs forgot their bones
and her caudal grew mighty
and her jaws engulfed such bore
that her grim father worried
the whale's vengeance would find him.
"I tricked you fair, but look! look!
Benthic feasts not yet fathomed,
krill-fat mouthfuls far from land!"
"Show me, dear father," said she,
and with a yawn devoured him.

My Athena

a beautiful face, etched
with strength, arms arranged
as if aiming an arrow

or warding off fate, her reach
for mythic status, observer,
a confirmation of who she is,

no dealer in the hands of fate
but only a bartering angel, walking
barefoot, through this anchored room,

breathing feathers,
over the listened and the reached
for, the lessened and the roving,

she hears a call for justice, some
mother lost her son to someone's
son, some man his wife, his daughter,

someone
else, someone else, someone
else's someone else,

sees how they are drowning
without each other, and she no more
effective than a foundling star

with crystal breath, half-shocks
desire into being, drifting feathers
in her wake, dragging a body

that rages with silence, a reach
against her history, wanting to divine
a future that holds a different story,

something better. A seer's picture,

open to a moment of divine madness,
hearing the muttering

of gods and monsters purring
in her ears, she consults the oracle
again, a crystal, held in the palm,

to tell her what the skies portend,
confronts the formation of destinies
dancing in the stardust in her hands...

JULIAN BRASINGTON

Tryst

Night comes, bluebell-scented and leads you
through your window to the woods
where the May tree makes its own galaxies

and when a kiss and laughter lay us
in a crush of wild garlic
and you gaze up, do you wonder

whose messenger the black-eyed owl is
still and staring down
as the moon rises and falls between your legs

Tell The Sea I Love Her

Tell the Sea I love her.

Watch the rolling waves
Gift them a gentle smile
Breathe the soft air and say
„You are loved by her“

(the Sea will know who you are talking about)

I get so lonely sometimes
When I can't hear her lullaby
And I fear if she goes unheard
She will share my loneliness

(there is an emptiness in the absence of waves)

What a terrifying life to lead
To remain a constant song
Always soft, always deadly
And caught in a never-ending dance

Tell the Sea I love her

(maybe it will still her longing
maybe it will still mine)

Tightrope Walker

(i.m. Alice Ernestine Prin – Kiki de Montparnasse – 1901 – 1953)

no net below
just faces gaping
till she topples
through kaleidoscope reflections of herself
naked climbing stairs
dancing with a bear
hair bobbed comme un garçon
cheeks stained red geranium
pubes and eyebrows shaved
redrawn with burnt out matchstick
or whatever shade has caught her mood

they call her *La Reine*
the dadaists
 surrealists
 futurists
come to be amused
by her risque performance
describe her face as cat-like
her profile as stuffed salmon
her scent as chicory pernod
but she's Guerlain's 'L'HEURE BLEUE'

when she climbs on tables
lifts her skirts
shimmies shameless Chez Kiki
garter hose and more
they buy her hashish red wine
paint her
 sculpt her
 film her
water-mirrored
smashed in glass
through flames
in sculpted wire

she is a Jean Cocteau

Max Ernst

Man Ray

a tightrope walker

dancing in the sky

Siren

Reins, charmed fetters, entangle me, ruly,
Rapt, if a tempest can be tormented,
What use is my resistance, the vexing
Voice emanates from the marrow, some sound

Risen, a guttural beckon, perfumed
Inflection, an inspired require insists
I resolve such epiphanic frissons
Each one, yet another death, a finished

Rinse, a deciduous skin shed so one
Can once again imbibe the bilious
Sweet sip, lip sugared, the seabird hisses
At my attention, the sparrow's spit, a

Resin, memento mori, evidence
Of what was done, and what will continue
So, too, the reports, the gush of grotesque,
Of bodies, lives, dole stolen, as focus

Wanna Make You Mine

Give me your eyes
there, like that, now we fish them

in the blood. Stretch the treasure map
over skin and smooth the folds

out like a twig crack, tight like
the in-flight swell of the hull sac

breathe hands out balloon-thin
stroke jaw neck and shoulderline

all fingers all everywhere
dig trenches in your seams

hear sand fight your spade bite
crunch grain shifting grain

wet palmed apart
the pearl of her silk-moist beluga yawn

and lift damp mollusc of my kidney out
fronds flailing for a mouth to suck

place my limpid bloated bean
my baby-caul

shiny, blindly, enforcibly
rootling within.

Say you want me.

You Do Not Have To Be Good

after Mary Oliver

i will try not to write about peaches.
i will try not to ring in your ears
with my siren wails and coyote yelps.
i will try to be as clear and ombré
as a desert sunset. i will try to be
more full moon, less crescent.
i will try not to burden you with
sorrows stagnant as this thick
mid-July humidity that clings
to our skin long after we've
retreated back indoors.
i will try to keep my small
cancer rituals behind your back, berry stains off
the carpet, creek sand between my toes
off the couch. i will try not
to taste of smoke. i will try instead
to taste as healing as honey, as sweet
as the forbidden fruit i vowed not
to mention. but i've never been good
at trying. i've mastered hesitations
outside the door. i've mastered muffling
your judgments, your no's, y o u
with the wolves in my gut and the ocean
waves of my soul. because i've never found
a plump, rosy peach i didn't want
to wrap my lips around,
sink my teeth into.

Sonorous Passageways

The shuttle, smaller than expected. Tin can. The curtain between classes so thin. Coughing from coach, a bubbling hack. The singer imagines droplets, swallowed invisibly into the air-con, circulated, spilling out above her head. She adjusts the vent away from her, wipes her hand on an anti-bacterial wipe. Balls it, tucks it into the sick-bag. Thinks of vomiting. Closes her mind and throat.

The design of the vent. Circular, spokes. Like old-fashioned jet engines. Ice crystals forming on the windows. She pulls her silk scarf tighter around her neck. The fins of the shuttle engines vibrate. The folds of the larynx. She imagines them testing the first jet engines. The deafening wind tunnel. Chickens flung through the mechanism. Blood and feathers, the sickening gristly squelch.

She expects a full house, to make it worth her while. This journey. It's not La Scala, but then neither is La Scala these days. And she is no longer who she was. What she was. Quinqueremes labour onwards through earshot, unwracked. Sailors survive, unmaddened by her song. Only civilized applause remains.

Pressure clamps her sinuses. The precious passageways of her craft. The corridors of her power. She places a lozenge on her tongue, sucks cautiously. Regains the audible world.

An explosive sneeze behind her. She imagines droplets, clinging to the nylon skirt of the steward. The coarse blue brushes her arm. She wipes herself with the last antibacterial wipe. Balls it. Landing. Cold moonscape. No car waiting. An oversight. A bus. Closer, the hacking, the bubbling. She pulls her silk scarf tighter. She imagines the heat of the footlights. A tickle in her throat, the smallest feather. The last wipe, gone. Salt gargle trapped in her luggage. She closes her mind and throat. She will fire her P.A. the moment her encore is over.

When the wind blows the water black.

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each - at least, I believe that I have: it may have been the wind, the howl, the hurl, the wail of a mother mourning the loss of some sailor son or other - and even if there was a Lorelei down there, a gleaming girl, all emerald hair and scales, I do not think that she would sing to me.

*

I have seen them riding seaward, astride the waves, tall and opaque, oblivious to men - why would they sing to rude sailors, when the night is ablaze with stars, all wet and harsh, and wouldn't you rather go out into the storm to try and catch a needlefish, than sit and sing and comb the white hair of the waves blown back?

*

When the wind blows the water white and black, we furl our sails and wait. I will tell you the truth: we are hoping for them - we long to be shipwrecked out of our tedious journeys to fish and back, our travels so dull and meaningless. We desire to be sung into their oblivion - that is why we have lingered in the chambers of the sea.

*

By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown is how I wish to die - do not tell my mother, who still hopes for her sons to become something or someone, while her sons long for seahorses made girls. This is how we sleep on our boats: we imagine ourselves kissed by a fish, till human voices wake us, and we drown.

The first and last lines of each stanza, in italics, come from a section of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', a long poem by T. S. Eliot (from 'Collected Poems 1909-1962', 1963). I have retained the original order, but made a few slight changes – and inserted a new story between them.

before Eric

the men in these parts would jump from their boats
taught by stern fathers and quiet mothers to

pursue who and where they wanted they
learned to swim after they lost their baby teeth and

sharp incisors punctured their gums
now they crash them into rocks

desperate to be wanted as we
lull them down with lethargic lullabies

like their mothers' songs with
one manicured talon across their chest

one slimy fin massaging our vocal chords so
how beautiful the waves were when they took that

burden from our shoulders, decided to
slam the ships against rock without our help

their foam sprinkled atop reflection pools like
sugar hiding poison under a thunder

more melodic than any song
we could sing when i pulled you from the water

i had never seen a man under the sun before
breathing in the air before

you mistook my salivating for lusting because
of course you would

and told me i was beautiful
i told you i was hungry

but you only heard a song like your mother's

Siren

I steer my dusty car onto the freeway
swing from lane to lane, a fearless *Dodge* driver
with nothing to lose, journey along the coast roads
wheels pointed directly at the sun
as Icarus aimed his wings, on the ascent.

Years ago I stepped from the Pacific
and despite a quiet, dry kind of living
my skin is shrunken, my spine curved
as if to fit a couch. My sisters are long lost.
No one can excavate water.

I can still be reckless, drink tequila, sleep where I fall -
wax a surfboard, strap it to the car
and at the beach, run with it despite the chaffing wetsuit
I paddle into icy water, soft belly
pressed against unyielding fiberglass.

Thinner-boned and thicker-skinned
my tattoos blurred down to faint blue smudges
I'm not as sharpened-tongued as I once was
but blessed with strong toes, I grip this board
and stand with back uncurled to ride across the waves.

Icy surf sprays up, to sting my eyes
throws grit against my teeth
salt leaves my long, white strands of hair tangled
into pale, sand-scattered locks, coral branches -
I am a Siren still, of this living sea.

Meeting Tsunami

I thought Tsunami would be a feral thing,
silt between her teeth and gasoline rainbow hair tangled with fishing nets,
distorted siren wail vomiting toxic black sludge.
She's frenetic, ravenous,
a cataclysmic Charybdis, right?
But Tsunami was scoured clean when I met him,
a china-white skeleton in black robes like a Buddhist monk's.
Such silence in the sockets of that rictus face, such stillness,
such unwarranted serenity!
We look the same beneath, he told me,
and I saw that I too had rotted down to fragile paper crane bones.
The revelation did not disturb me;
it was comforting to be done with the meat and its attendant miseries.
We did indeed look identical, Tsunami and I.
Just two skeletons clad in black,
smiling through eternity.