

Silk Black

by May Dy

She wanted to go back there, burning with memory and trauma. The sea at night was silk black, we watched as it rose and rolled at our feet, our only light was the moon and pinpricks from fireflies gathered around trees behind us, little lamps on the fishermen's boats to guide them a short distance— subsistence on light. The lighthouse was long gone. Would she come back, ever? Would she come back for me? But I knew, at the center of myself, where an empty well stood (instead of a heart and lungs), that she did things only for herself. She wouldn't answer my question, she never will. But there in her eyes as dark as the night sea, it gleamed with apology. I could almost read through her mouth-shape that she was asking me for forgiveness. She took my small hands in her candle-stick fingers. Smooth and straight, even the lines you'd think they were carved by a fine, sharp knife. And she told me: 'You are both *here* and *there*. I am only *there*. You're blessed to be endowed with two homes.' Was I? The waves roared as they crashed against rocks, against the indifferent shore. What did it mean to belong to two homes? I thought I'd find the answer under the waves. Let me come with you, I held her arms, I sobbed—a child whose mother was already departed even before she dove into that silk black sea. No. Please. You can't come; *I can't let you*. Please? Please? Let me come with you. She disappeared at sea, into that old life. I was left here on shore, the child with another, quite different life. I wonder which life was quieter. I thought I'd find meaning under the waves. But as soon as the water reached my ankles, the meaning of that life I wished to live fragmented into sea foam, into a language I can only understand by its movement, not by sound.

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The inspiration for 'Silk Black' came from the image of the sea at night. Two years ago, my sister-in-law took me and my older sister on a trip to her hometown. She lived in a house near the sea and there, at night, I saw the night sea illuminated by the light of the moon. And I found myself being drawn not only to the image embedded into my mind, but to the very thought of what it must be like to be live in the sea. And in tales involving mermaids, they'd thought of the same thing – what would it be like to live on land?

Another inspiration came by way of a local tale in which a mermaid falls in love with a man and goes out of her way to be with him. This takes place in some form of magical shell rubbed on to her tail which turns it into legs. As long as she has that magical shell, she can transform her tail into legs anytime she wants. This story has a happy ending, with the mermaid marrying her love and having child with him. But it makes me reconsider the situation since this mermaid also has a family at sea – she had a life on water, which she will eventually have to go back to, and a life on land, in which she is invested. The mermaid considers herself only a part of the sea and her daughter questions her assertion that her

daughter was blessed to have “two homes”. I wrote the prose-poem in the point of view of the mermaid’s child, a daughter. Using the daughter’s point of view I think added to the drama of the mother’s ‘dilemma of being’ and, ultimately, the child being separated from her mother. And I think this can be connected to the reality that some parents are separated from their children. In some instances, they come back for visits, in other instances, they don’t come back and there are reasons for these. The image of the sea at night and the dilemma of being was what made me write ‘Silk Black’. In the very end, the mermaid will be made to choose. Heartbreaking as it is, it seems that, which the daughter’s point of view, the mermaid has already chosen even before she returned to the waves.