

## ***Blue notebooks***

“My mother is a witch! She has a plank of wood nailed to her spine and ice in her veins. That is why you are so stiff in the morning father, your body is defrosting from a night spent next to her.” My father shook his head without anger. He was a softly spoken man with a big heart. Their relationship was a mystery to me. Laughter rarely wasted its time on my mother, but more than once I heard it murmuring behind the walls of their bedroom.

My brother Henry grew in the womb with me but was taken by fever as we finished the first year of our lives. Father had recovered enough from the loss to love me, my mother it often seemed had not. I was told of a great sadness that followed her. People spoke as if she used to be someone else but in my stories she was witch or a werewolf.

Father was a magnificent storyteller. He told me tales of a girl who was born half fish, half human. She had a human mind and face with seaweed coloured hair tied in a braid. She grew to have a body like any other with a powerful tail visible only in water. She could have easily disguised herself in our world, dancing in bars with men who found her blue tinted skin and silver eyes beautiful. She preferred though to live among the fish, visiting every ocean and swimming under boats to guide sailors home. At times she returned to the shore, acting as a guardian for turtles who followed the moon on their journey to the sea.

At seventeen I wanted the freedom to write. My hands buzzed as if I had bees on each fingertip everytime I opened the blue notebook gifted by my father. My mother disapproved of my passion. She cursed my disinterest in school and stared coldly when I told stories of a girl who wore starfish on her ears to hear the secrets of the sea. Regardless, I filled pages with the small miracles that were common in my world. I wrote down the wondrous tales my father told and things I myself had seen. One day, when I travelled the world I would have dozens of stories to share. Each one so fantastical and rich with beauty that people would have difficulty believing them.

During one of my mother's rare outings my father called me to him, beckoning me to follow to the room my parents shared. It had not been swallowed by the darkness of my mother's presence like I imagined. It looked instead as if someone had grabbed all the colours of the ocean with their hands and swirled them around the room. The stray bands of light that fell over the bed were lemony and warm. My father retrieved a blue notebook, the sister to my own, from my mother's cabinet and passed it to me. With it I walked to the shoreline by our home. It fell open on my lap easily, as if its pages had been turned many times. By my mother's hand I read the story of a man who would drop to the floor when the beautiful woman he desired entered a room. Overtime he

caused cracks in the ground beneath him, until one day he fell right to its centre. There he became the axis of the earth, slowly spinning the world for the woman he loved.

Turning to the pages that held the story of the fish-girl who guarded turtles, I realised where my father had found the words that enchanted me. They were a gift from my mother, a piece of who she had once been. I could feel the magic she had seen in the world. I imagined it being grabbed from her mind and guzzled by grief.

Hands buzzing, I wrote to her the story of a woman chased by shadows for so long she began to forget the wonder in the world. In hope she tossed her mind to the moon, exploding it into a billion pieces that littered the sky. Stars, forever watching and illuminating the beauty below.