

Shadow Lovers

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Cook County High School, grade 9

I wish I may, I wish I might have this wish I wish tonight. It was a starry night long, long ago when my grandfather told me this story. I always thought that it was just a tale, but now I am grown and I know the truth. . .

Salena. She was an old peddler woman by day. She wore a drunken smile as she sold her potions and pixie dust. Salena was a gypsy traveler. She would read your palm for fifty cents and tell you your future in her old cracked crystal ball for just a touch more. But these things were nothing but rubbish and Salena knew that. It was all in the way she presented it. She was an actor in heart and she played her part perfectly. She could sense people's feelings when they came to her. She could tell what they wanted to hear and that is what she told them. Everyone left her tent happy and sent others to her; that is how gypsies make a living, and Salena knew that. Salena wasn't happy with her life as a fortuneteller; she wanted more, and that is why she *lived* at night.

The night has fallen. A silent shadow dances lightly in the streets. Up and down the walks it goes until at last it reaches its destiny – a small dark tent amongst brightly painted caravans. The shadow slips inside. In the corner of the tent Salena sleeps, curled up in a tight ball, her blankets pulled tightly against her to keep out the cold. The shadow touches the old woman, strokes her cheek gently and then enters the old woman's body. A second later two shadows emerge from Salena's body and dance together in the middle of the tent. Then together they slip out of the tent hand-in-hand. They sail through the air and dance on the water – just dance. When the moon starts to drop and the sun starts to rise, the two shadows slip back to the cold, dark tent and Salena's abandoned body. The shadows part, and Salena's body stirs as a shadow enters.

Her eyelids flutter, then open. She slowly pushes herself up, her joints creaking with old age. Today is the day, she tells herself, today is the day she will dance forever with her shadow lover. She's had enough of this life and she's lived enough. She stands, naked, in the middle of her tent and waits. The shadow comes. It strokes Salena's cheek and then enters into her body. A second later two shadows emerge hand-in-hand. Salena's body slumps to the ground, and the shadows dance out of the tent and down the street, out of the town, never to be seen again. . .

It was my grandfather who found her that day, naked, slumped on the ground with that drunken smile on her face, and he knew. He knew.

And I've seen them, those two shadow lovers dancing down the streets when they think that no one is watching. But I am. I've watched them more than once as I wished on my stars, and I know. I know.



The Sea-Child

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They swim together in the sea of liquid sapphire, tail and flippers waving in time to the endless tempo of the tides. Light streams down from the surface, so far above, and dances across their backs.

She turns her head and rises from them alone. The water foams and froths about her as she breaks through the sky of her world and enters a new world. Carried by the waves, she gently drifts upon the sandy shore.

Flippers turn into fingers, tail turns into toes. Silken fur falls away to reveal smooth skin. She stands upright and throws the sealskin aside, marveling at this strange realm.

They come silently, swiftly. They seize her, muttering strange words. She screams, but no one answers her call. She can only watch helplessly as the strangers take her sealskin and walk away. Her gate back into her world is barred and locked. . .

Thalassa awoke with a start, gray eyes staring into the darkness at something that wasn't there. *It's that dream again,* she thought. *Always that same dream.*

Brushing her dark hair out of her face, she rolled out of bed and walked to the window. She flung it open, breathing in the crisp sea air.

For as long as Thalassa could remember, she had always dreamed of the sea, the seal, and the skin. She didn't know why, but these dreams always filled her with a deep longing, a yearning for something she couldn't identify. Thalassa frowned as she gazed at the sea, pounding the shoreline a mere one hundred paces from her window. The rhythm of the waves always soothed her.

"Thally!" Her mother entered the room, worried face framed by wispy blond curls. "Thally! Are you all right?" "Yeah," Thalassa replied, not turning her head.

Her mother swept over to the window. "Please close that window. The cold sea air is going to make you sick." "But, Mom. . ."

Thalassa's mother ignored her and shut the window, closing out all sounds of the surf. Thalassa sighed and climbed back into bed.

"Sleep tight now, honey, okay? Good night." Her mother left Thalassa alone in the suffocating silence.

"See you later, Mom!" Brad shrieked over the roar of the school bus engine. He bounced up the steps and into an empty seat, waving hysterically. Thalassa followed, sliding into a seat near the back of the bus.

Two girls in the seat across from her stared at her. Thalassa knew who they were. They were the most popular girls in the entire eighth grade, and (in her opinion) the brattiest. The girls kept whispering to each other and laughing, never taking their eyes off her. Thalassa kept her eyes straight ahead, staring at the front of the bus where Brad's blond hair bobbed up and down.

Looking at Brad's hair reminded her. She was *different*. She was the only one in the family with dark hair and funny gray eyes. Everyone else — even Rose, her sister who had been lost in a boating accident — was blond. Sometimes, when Thalassa fought with her older sister Elise, Elise would say, "Well, you're not one of *us*. You came from somewhere else!"

And then her parents would come, and tell her she was part of the family, she was just like the rest of them, she *belonged* here. However, Thalassa was sure they never met her eyes when they said that.

"Today, your homework is pages 60-61. Read the poem, and answer the questions. You are dismissed."

The voice of the English teacher rang through the classroom, but it was drowned out by the joyous shouts of students as they rushed out the door, escaping from the last class of the day. Thalassa stayed behind, staring at the poem.

Irish Legend

*They bore a daughter, a fair child was she;
But despair was theirs — she was taken by the sea.
But as the sea takes, it gives in return;
A sea-child was found upon the sand of the morn.*

*Tread softly, my sea-child, wake not thy kin;
Fingers feeling blindly, for the sea skin.
Feet into flippers, skin into fur;
Back into thy world, beloved sea-daughter.*

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Her English teacher had walked up behind her.

"Mm. . . yeah," Thalassa mumbled.

"The Irish used to tell tales of seals who turned into humans. *Silkies*, I believe they were called." He paused. "There are some American tales of silkies as well. . ."

At dinner, Thalassa's father said he had good news for the family.

"Really, Dad? Tell me, now!" Brad pounded his spoon on the table.

"Well. . ." His father stood up and cleared his throat importantly. "I got a new job in the city. We're going to move there in a few months."

Everyone cheered wildly. Except for Thalassa. *The city*, she thought. *It will be so far away from the sea. . .*

She didn't think she could bear it if she was separated from the sea. She loved the sea, the ebbing of the tides, the pounding of the surf, the feel of sand beneath her feet, and the occasional herd of seals. Every day, after school, she would go swim in its waters. It brought back memories that she couldn't quite recall. However, her parents feared for her safety. "We lost Rose," they said. "And we don't want to lose you."

Her pleas fell upon deaf ears. Elise and Brad told her she was acting funny, and her mother told her she was being selfish. "This is going to be a wonderful opportunity for our family," she said. "Please don't ruin it. We can visit the beach in the summer."

Thalassa sat by the seashore, lit by the midnight moon, and scooped up a handful of sand. It ran through her fingers, as swiftly as the past few months had gone by. The suitcases were packed and the car was loaded. They would move tomorrow, to the apartment. Her father had brought pictures of it home. It was a strange, forbidding place — all wood and stone, no water. Nothing she loved. Thalassa sighed.

She reached down to scoop up another handful, and felt something soft beneath her fingers, like velvet. Startled, she stroked it again, and felt a tingle run through her whole body. It was so familiar. . .

And then the memories, the long forgotten memories flooded into her. The dream, the poem, the legend. . . it all came alive, it all made sense! Thalassa dug frantically in the sand, until she unearthed the object. She knew what it was even before she pulled it out and held it up to brush the sand off.

"I am the sea-child," she whispered, tears sparkling in her eyes. "The sea took Rose, but it gave me. . ."

Then seals were all around her, nuzzling her with velvety noses. She pulled on the skin, feeling the transformation taking place, feet into flippers, skin into fur. . .

Her mother sat up in bed, heart pounding, one word upon her lips. "Thalassa." A sudden fear seized her. The sea was about to take another child. She sprang out of bed and hurried to the window.

She saw nothing but a solitary seal, gazing back at her wistfully before slipping silently into the sea.

Crush

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He's perfect in every way. She sighed under her breath as she watched the red Cadillac peel out of the parking lot in the wrong direction. Its massive back end made a wide arc through the treacherous teenage traffic jam, its wheels screeching as it cut off a whiny teal Neon and narrowly missed a protesting black Blazer. Her eyes followed the car as it nudged into traffic and disappeared over the horizon.

He drove a red Cadillac, not one of the bass-pounding, status-screaming SUVs that carpeted the parking lot, and she liked him for it. If it had been another boy behind the scarlet wheel, she would probably shake her head and with a wicked gleam in her eye crack some joke about old people cars. But for him, there was no nefarious gleam, only a soft, secretly longing gaze as she thought how the gigantic Cadillac seemed to fit him, seemed to make him special somehow. It must have been the way he drove the Cadillac, like a sports car, not like the boat it obviously was, revving it up and punching backwards as he whooshed out of the parking space. He drove aggressively, not daftly, taking risks at every other stop sign like she did. She admired the pure, youthful spirit that overcame the old-fogethiness of the car.

She had fallen into the infatuation completely without warning. One day she happened to glance up in history class, and there he was. Of course she knew him, vaguely remembering him as the quiet, tow-headed kid in her speech class the year before and she kicked herself because she could not remember a single speech he had given. The gray mists of sophomore year had settled over her recollections of the class and of him; even for all her straining she could not penetrate those hazy depths to recall the topic of his informative speech or the angle of his persuasive speech.

Maybe it was better that way. The less she knew about his personality, the less she knew about his warts, the more she could create. She could lie in bed and dream up their first date, filled with fragrance and blossoms and the sizzle of her palm on his. As she slumped, bored and uncomfortable within the cold steel confines of a desk, her drooping eyelids could play host to a continuous reel of action adventures, each one bigger and better than the last. Following her careful choreography, they would parachute food into starving countries, stalk criminal masterminds, and pilot hijacked planes to safety. Fantasizing had always been an escape for her; the tantalizing question *So what if we were stranded on a deserted island together?* never failed to transform the monotonous drone of the domains and derivatives into the gentle lapping of azure water against shimmering sand.

Of course, they were not stranded on a deserted island, but in high school. No matter how elaborately she created, that stifling, buzzing, cigarette-smoking reality invariably mashed her daydreams under its platform-clad foot. And in the reality of high school, the perfect boy was always perfectly out of reach. *Such is life*, she mused, *that the boy of my dreams has a gorgeous girlfriend.* His girlfriend was one of those delicate goddesses whose wardrobe consisted of a pastel for every occasion — a petal pink cardigan on Monday and a buttercup sweater on Tuesday. His girlfriend's taut skin defied nature, glowing bronze even against the tall frosty drifts of January. His girlfriend had the lithe, graceful body expected of the Minnesota Youth Ballet's prima ballerina. Granted, she too danced, but she spent her dance classes struggling to land a single pirouette amidst the plump, tottering, elderly students of Ballet for Beginners.

Perhaps some day he'll see through his girlfriend's beauty, hear the hollow ringing behind his girlfriend's golden ears, she would think to herself, but she knew it would be a distant day. Even in his idealized form, he was still a teenage boy, and she could not disregard the hypnotic power of hormones. Yet she still found herself raising her hand for no reason in history class, trying to spout off elegant expla-

Poetry

nations for the Crash of '29 and hoping that he would respond; that his arm would ascend lazily into the air and that he would huskily denounce speculation as the evil that had brought down the nation.

She was puzzled by what drew her to him so strongly. He wasn't all that cute, maybe even a little gawky, and he was definitely not hot. He lacked the clean cut, slightly feminine features that enamored so many girls. Then again, she had made it a rule to never like a guy prettier than herself. He was tall — she avoided diminutive crushes because she had a terrible aversion to the idea of liking anyone dwarfed by her younger brother. Caught in his mysterious charisma, she was continually surprised by the way his squint brown eyes and nondescript blond hair could set her heart thumping.

The red Cadillac now off in the unseen distance, she stirred from her reverie. Homework, the all-consuming task that draped itself across her afternoon, soon shoved him from her consciousness. As she maneuvered her little lavender car into the grocery store parking lot later that evening, she contentedly hummed along with the radio. She hummed "Joy to the World" as she slammed the car door shut, hummed "Joy to the World" as she strolled across the parking lot, hummed "Joy to the World" as her

hand reached out for the door — and abruptly stopped humming. There he was, coming out as she was going in, holding the door for her, a wide smile on his lips as he looked deep into her eyes and asked in his melodious tenor, "Hey. How are you?" Instantaneously she felt the flaming crimson surge as all the blood in her heart poured into her face. She managed to gulp out a "Great!" and suppress a squeal all in one breath as she ducked past him into the store. The squeal and a brief victory dance manifested themselves seconds later in the frozen foods aisle.

On the ride home, with Boca burgers, bananas, and broccoli tucked safely in her trunk, she glowed with the image of his smile singed into her brain. The swift purple car rumbled and shook, its side mirrors jiggling to the rap that blasted from its speakers. She swiveled her hips as best she could under the constructing seat-belt, rolling her shoulders and pumping her arm to Missy Elliot's beat. "I want the hot boys, in the Jaguars and the Lexus," she rapped, smirking as she thought of the lumbering Cadillac. She giggled to herself at the contrary images of hot boys and Cadillacs. His smile would warm her for a long time.

Lilac

The sweet array of my favorite lavender flower
fills the Cierra's air.
Not even three different cigarettes
can put out this sun.
He puts his arms around me
and pulls me close.
I forget all time and reason.
Desire reigns supreme
and passion drips gently off my delicate fingertips.
His tongue plays with my lips coyly.
He knows what he is doing.
I feel myself becoming him
and I am alive inside.
I slowly step out of the car
and all I recall are lilacs.

Abby Marquart

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Fiction

Moonlight

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Edina High School, grade 11

Rosemary lay motionless in her bitter, jailed bed. She was alone in the darkened hospital room, with the exception of the softly humming machines maintaining their artificial nurture. They snaked their electronic tentacles across her frail young body, and she appeared to be a delicate moth snared in a tangled spider's web of IV tubes and cords. Her arms were encrusted in needles, and their venomous punctures perforated her delicate skin and patterned her body in bruises. Her pallid skin provided little contrast to the bone-white bed sheets. Exquisite strands of Rosemary's tar-colored hair graced her pillow. The rise and fall of her meager chest could scarcely be detected. Only her eyes were alive.

Rosemary's eyes were luminous jade orbs, worn sad beyond her age. They were frantically alert, and they flew around the room like two starlings gone mad. It was her two hundred seventieth day in room 466, Unit Four, West Wing of Mercy Hospital. She knew every single millimeter of the sterile room. She was tired.

It was that isolated period of night sometime between midnight and dawn, when the workings of time seemed to corrode to a rusty creaking halt. The steady stream of medical personnel had slowed to a trickle. The immense unit nurse had checked in on Rosemary twenty minutes ago. The nurse bore a name tag proclaiming, "HELLO: MY NAME IS LOUISE" and a sloppily pasted hospital-issue sympathy smile for her patient's benefit. After some appropriately perky conversation and a brief check of the various appliances that were monitoring and maintaining Rosemary's existence, the nurse had shut the door after her bulky presence, leaving the room in a vacuum of darkness.

Now the harvest moon had risen and moonbeams streamed from the night sky like grains of sand scattered from

an earth-stained fist. The shafts of light drifted through the window and splintered against the beige hospital wall in jagged, irregular shards. Rosemary's eyes were transfixed by the moon. The swollen sphere had cocooned itself in the inky folds of the night. Rosemary envied the lunar globe its radiance, its iridescent beauty. As she gazed, she coveted the moon's incredible autonomy and authority. The moon possessed the power to engulf the whole earth in its light. It was a more elegant, subtle force than the sun, which scraped the soil with its burning claws. The moon existed in a state of virtually unattainable perfection.

Barely cognizant of her doing so, Rosemary quietly rose from the confines of her bed. As she slid first one, then the other fragile foot onto the cold hospital tile, she faintly heard the stretching and snapping of the tubes and wires that bound her to her bed, and by extension, the world in which she was held captive. The shrill keening screams emitted by various machines were the only other indicators of the revolution occurring in Room 466.

Rosemary glided more than walked to the window. The shower of moonlight radiating from beyond the glass transformed her body into a frail silhouette. As she carefully opened the window to the invasion of the chill night air, Rosemary slid the screen from the window with seemingly practiced fingers. She crept onto the windowsill with a feline adeptness that defied her weakened state.

Balancing on the window ledge, Rosemary ventured a glance into the world from which she had so long been excluded. What she saw filled her with giddy exhilaration. The view from her fourth floor window was spectacular. The hospital grounds were coated in a sheen of drifted snow. Trees stood with their distorted, envious fingers reaching toward the perfect night. Rosemary's gaze traveled upwards and she gasped at the awe-inspiring display of lunar power. The moon appeared to overtake the expanse of sky.

Rosemary's eyes brimmed with tears of freedom and release. She gave one last gaze around her tired room. Then she closed her eyes, took a deep, contented breath, turned. . . and embraced the moon.