



THE HERON'S LULLABY

SHAH TAZRIAN ASHRAFI

I glide through the salt wind;
I settle on the salt rocks;
I pluck herrings from the blue;
I hover over the Sperm whales,
The Minke, the Blue.

I've given them names –
Names I call out with my beak, like an ambulance
siren.
Names that jive to the sound of crashing waves.

Angelia, Ophelia, Armelia;
They love it when I call them.
They know me. I know them. The wind knows us.
We are the flowers of this ecosystem of salt,
Which cups us in its palms with grace,
Which curls its lips to say Family,
Which sings us songs and gives us waves.

Its graceful palms fall powerless though
When metal hands emerge from the sky
And pluck the lives from the ocean –
Angelias, Ophelias, Armelias;
Snap them like twigs midair;
Bleed them dry;
Wear them on their fingers;
And disappear into the sky,
Leaving the ocean bloodied and mourning,
The ecosystem amputated,
And a little saltier than before.

I call out their names;
Ambulance siren in this ecosystem.
Maybe it needs to reach a hospital
Should there be an air ambulance
Flying through the damn sky?
Or a regular one?
Call it soon.



Silhouette

UPOMA AZIZ

Her hair was perfect. Like, so perfect that if she would have to sell it to buy him a present, she would have a lot more than just twenty dollars. Not that she needed to, or that he'd let her.

He, perhaps loved her perfect hair not because his own would grow so uncontrollably messy had he ever tried growing it beyond the sober half an inch he limited it to, but because it was her hair.

She had big, dreamy eyes, like the world never failed to surprise her; the gold of the sunshine reflected in her eyes was fine by him too – he didn't have to squint to look at the sun anymore.

His nose was sculpted to match the ones seen on images of ancient Greek deities, and he loved her little nose, which, he often joked, wasn't enough to let sufficient oxygen in. He loved it when she would scrunch it up when he kissed the top of it.

If he started singing, everything within a hundred mile radius would wither away and die, so he played instead. And he played like Apollo, or maybe Apollo himself couldn't beat him in a guitar jam session. She

couldn't stop herself from humming along, which, to his pleasure, would soon turn into a song – his song. And he was her tune.

She loved reading, he loathed it. He loved her voice, but being the shy girl that she was, she didn't want the world to hear it. But he wasn't the world. He was her world. So she'd read to him, almost every single night.

He was tall, she was not.

He had a temper, she did not. He belonged with her, and she with him.

I had loved him since forever. They wished to be together forever after.

They were picture-perfect together. I was silhouetted in the background.

I write down their story, for they are too much in love to do so. That when they go down in history, together, as star-crossed lovers, I would carefully scoop myself out of their story.

For it is not the story of a silhouette.

Upoma Aziz is a walking-talking, ticking time-bomb going off at random detonators. Poke her to watch her explode at www.fb.com/upoma.aziz