

• DARLENE BARRY QUAIFE •

*Sirenia*

*~ Mermaids sing but they don't cry ~*

The tears of an ugly mermaid are an aphrodisiac. He beat it with a stick to make it cry more. The heat was enough. Penned in behind the hut, out of water, the tears flowed not to lubricate love but to protect the eyes. Blinded by tears so not to be blinded by light. Especially the reflection of the tin cup held against first one eye then the other. The metal hot. The precious liquid evaporating so there would never be enough to satisfy. In the name of passion he beat it some more. He was mistaken to think that pain would produce anything more than grunts. He associated these sounds with his wife and took them as a good omen. Over the years he had had a lot of success with a good, stout rod. The tears he deposited in small blue bottles with tight cork stoppers. He stored them in a tin box under the floorboards not far from where they slept on their mat. It was the coolest place or so he decided. But of course the box of treasure was close by, aphrodisiac to his fantasies. He had never tasted tears. Now there was no need. He was passed wanting anymore children. They either died or forgot to send money from their jobs in the city. The tears were for other men. It was better to have the mermaid. Beached right outside his door, it was a gift from the gods. That's how he took it.