

Neruda: Fable of the Mermaid & The Drunks

by  
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"Fable of the Mermaid and The Drunks" by Pablo Neruda

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## Fable of the Mermaid and the Drunks

All those men were there inside,  
when she came in totally naked.  
They had been drinking: they began to spit.  
Newly come from the river, she knew nothing.  
She was a mermaid who had lost her way.  
The insults flowed down her gleaming flesh.  
Obscenities drowned her golden breasts.  
Not knowing tears, she did not weep tears.  
Not knowing clothes, she did not have clothes.  
They blackened her with burnt corks and cigarette stubs,  
and rolled around laughing on the tavern floor.  
She did not speak because she had no speech.  
Her eyes were the colour of distant love,  
her twin arms were made of white topaz.  
Her lips moved, silent, in a coral light,  
and suddenly she went out by that door.  
Entering the river she was cleaned,  
shining like a white stone in the rain,  
and without looking back she swam again  
swam towards emptiness, swam towards death.

Pablo Neruda

FADE IN:

INT. DOCTOR'S OFFICE - DAY

A doctor holds a newborn baby girl. She is small enough to fit in his hands (this can be stock footage). She is still covered in amniotic fluid. A NARRATOR speaks.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

All those men were inside, when she came in totally naked. They had been drinking, they began to spit.

The doctor cuts the umbilical cord as they child screams.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

A two girls play in a field of flowers near a river, chasing one another. One is 7, the other 5.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Newly come from the river, she knew nothing.

Pulling back from the scene of the girls, we see their mother is watching them play. She has bright emerald eyes, which we focus on.

EXT. MARKETPLACE, EGYPT (MODERN DAY) - DAY

We pull back, revealing we are in the marketplace. The woman is now dressed in a burka, covering her from head to toe. The children are at her side, the 7 year old dressed like the mother, the other child dressed in a sundress as in the field.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

She was a mermaid who had lost her way.

They stand perfectly still in the middle of this place, as people rush about them, almost blurred. As people pass, they stare at the girl in the dress.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
The insults flowed down her  
gleaming flesh. Obscenities drowned  
her golden breasts.

The little girl looks up at her mother, and the mother looks  
down at her. The girl looks confused.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Not knowing tears, she did not weep  
tears.

The little girl looks at her sister, who extends to her a  
burka of her own.

NARRATOR (V.O.) (CONT'D)  
Not knowing clothes, she did not  
have clothes.

The girl runs. The mother shouts after her but the sister  
stands still, still holding the outfit.

EXT. ALLEY - DAY

We see her shadow cast down a long alleyway, as she runs.  
After she passes, we see two larger shadows following.

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
They blackened her with burnt corks  
and cigarette stubs, and rolled  
around laughing on the tavern  
floor.

EXT. MARKETPLACE - DAY

The mother is being interrogated by a policeman. She shields  
her older daughter as the policeman shouts.

NARRATOR (V.O.)  
She did not speak because she had  
no speech. Her eyes were the colour  
of distant love, her twin arms were  
made of white topaz.

EXT. MARKETPLACE, NEAR FRUIT STAND - DAY

Two policemen are talking to a shopkeeper, who describes the  
little girl with his hands, and points toward us. The  
policemen dash off.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Her lips moved, silent in a coral light, and suddenly she went out the door.

EXT. RIVER - NIGHT

The girl runs toward the river, through the field she was playing in before. As she runs, two flashlight beams bob in the distance, growing larger.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

Entering the river, she was cleaned, shining like a stone in the rain.

The girl reaches the river, but just as she does, the policemen catch up with her, grabbing her.

EXT. MARKETPLACE - DAY

Back in the marketplace, and to the mother's eyes. They look resigned instead of determined. We pull out again. This time the little girl is dressed as her mother and sister, standing idle as the world rushes around them.

NARRATOR (V.O.)

And without looking back she swam again, swam towards emptiness, swam towards death.