



# MARA

by Andrea DeAngelis



"Mara." I liked the way he mouthed it, softly like a sweetness, even though he trapped me by sealing the crack I had come through. I liked his warm, wet mouth. And maybe I asked for such an imprisonment.

I'd been haunting him for weeks like a dream, but I am not a dream, I'm the other thing. I was only mist before slipping through the crack beside his bed. I could only speak to him while he was sleeping. I knew he heard me because of his tossing and turning. I hungered to taste the sweat of him.

The gray waters of the northern coast were not enough for my fisherman. His intense loneliness shone to me, beckoning, but speaking to him in this fleeting way didn't give him any comfort. I like to think he *had* to meet me, which is why he trapped me.

## BOWERY GOTHIC

plugged the space with mutton fat from his candle. The wispy tendrils of myself solidified at the sight of him and he looked at me as if he could see me. I drank him in.

I warmed his bed that night and after he fell asleep I watched him. I do not sleep. I have slept for too long already. I caressed him, unused to the sensation of touching, and I relished it. In daylight, he was younger than I had initially thought in the black and the gray of night. He was red-cheeked under his rough, sandy beard and his darting brown eyes had the drinkable spark of youth.

In the morning, he awoke and told me, "Since you have chosen to haunt me, you can serve as my wife."

His voice startled me. It was deep and angry like a gash of wind, yet exhilarating. I did not understand what *servicing* meant, but his voice opened me to the possibility.

"You are pretty for one so pale. You please me."

I touched his mouth to feel the words and his bristles. After a moment, he pushed my hand away. Was he as frightened as I was?

He got up and dressed in silence, throwing a long-worn shirt and pants my way. I watched how he put on his extra skin and did the same, following him into the cottage's kitchen and sitting room.

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I took the matted, torn nets in my translucent hands. I had no memory of flesh being so white, almost blue, in the early morning light. I remembered my fingers, but not my skin. It had been an eternity since I had a physical shape, but my fingers knew what to do as if I was familiar with their strange yet elegant architecture. Perhaps I wasn't from the night but from the sea — both deep, dark and unforgiving.

I felt my fisherman return before I saw him. The wanting was heavy like waves swallowing me. An hour earlier, I started to dissolve without his flesh being near. I needed him. I slipped outside into the bright light. Stunned by the sun, I almost stumbled on the black stone beach. Seeing him stride up the rocky path, I ran to him with my bare, unfamiliar feet. His face still caught in a dream, shuddered, so I stopped before reaching him. We stood three arm lengths away.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"I do not know."

"Where do you come from?"

"I do not know."

"What are you?"

## BOWERY GOTHIC

His lips parted and closed. He scratched his beard, thinking. "You are my wife still, but you have another name." He rubbed his tired eyes. "You were a nightmare, but in the day—"

I interrupted him, he was close to knowing. "I am Mara."

Once he repeated it, I was sure of its sound. "Mara," he drew out the enunciation. "Yes." He continued to rub his eyes like he had upon first waking. He came closer to me, an arm's length now. "Do you know where you come from?"

I shook my head. I was something like a moth before. Maybe I'd even been someone else before becoming part of the night and the endless mist, but I did not tell him this.

He didn't ask any more questions because I kissed his mouth to stop the gnawing words. He only whispered Mara into my dark cloud of hair. After I embraced him, I felt more solid, less loosely tethered to my tender new skin. I could love him for filling me this way.

Later, I hung his catch of mackerel and herring to dry over the smoking, seaweed-lined pits behind his battered cottage. I caught the eye of his suspicious neighbors in the afternoon's long shadows. My fisherman had been alone for so long, they were unsure what to make of me. He told me not to speak to his neighbors. He was afraid they'd steal me. For a few days, they only nodded at me but didn't speak or come closer. They were like the mist, fading and disintegrating. Until Hilda.

**BOWERY GOTHIC**

children will do that to you. They will suck the life out of you.”

Indeed, Hilda looked empty and carved out.

“They will leave you for devils and demons, unless you suck the life out of them first,” she hissed, then shuffled away.

Over the next few weeks, every time my fisherman embraced me, I felt bits of him pulling away. At first, I only absorbed his red cheeks, my own growing plump and rosy in kind. Under my caresses, his hair rusted and thinned, the tangled strands coming away like kelp caught in my netting of skin and nails. My own hair shone thick and dark, enough to drown in. My lips and skin grew pinker every night we spent together, while his grew pallid and his eyes fell fallow.

It was easy enough to see I was killing him with my living, but I savored the corporeal and the carnal gorging. The warmth in my crevices, the buffering of the harsh wind against my skin, every sensation I'd been without for so long, I reveled in. I'd forgotten the lushness of life. Fragments of memory loosened and floated back to me of who I was before. They were clouded images at first, then the memories condensed and thickened into fleshy remembrance.

I draw my fisherman's life out every night like the vapor I was, the bones underneath his skin rising up to the surface, like the sea's leavings on the shore. But won't his fate be similar to the women here, just a faster drain? For them it takes years, for him mere weeks.

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man die instead this time? And with the splaying of that thought into the dark beach, I knew how I had died – giving birth. My nameless male mate away at sea, leaving me to bleed out like a broken beast.

Still, I would like to swell with another child, a girl of ice and anger, but I don't think my fisherman will survive the ride.



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