

# Fish Out of Water

by Emily Stidsen

Flecks of colored light like water  
danced across the domed tin roof,  
rusted bolts illuminated  
by the lapping of cool green light.  
Shimmering like the ocean,  
spackled with an aquatic glow,  
the circus car looked almost  
beautiful,  
the garish yellow paint chipping  
masked  
by the mellow waves  
of iridescence.

Dappled in her own reflections  
glimmering vivaciously,  
she mindlessly scratches her  
tail, scaled crackling  
with arid discomfort,  
fire creeping up her body  
with no water to extinguish it.  
Her days are numbered.

“A mermaid!”  
a snotty toddler cries,  
prodding her chapped  
and bleeding skin  
with a pudgy finger  
stained cotton candy blue.  
If he does not stop,  
It will be stained red.

Retreating, sliding scorched scales  
across the nail-strewn floor,  
leaving a trail of grimy blood,  
she hides in her shimmering misery  
coiled like a clam without a shell.  
About to be devoured.  
And from her new corner  
comes another stabbing finger,  
that of a leering lecher  
drinking in her nakedness.  
She had never known shame  
until now.

Grasping the claw-scarred bars,  
breaking her talons on grating metal,  
she desperately tries to leave behind these fingers,  
these eyes,  
this ocean of light that is not an ocean.  
But there is no escape.