

Sea Fret

by Kathy Hoyle

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Sea listens.

Boys. Three boys. Lithe-limbed boys with windswept curls, slipping on seaweed, clinging and climbing on mossy rocks, catcalling through cupped hands. Boys, who bellow dares and whoop and push and land in icy sea foam spray, voices on the cusp of breaking,

Sea wants.

Boys. Three boys. Bare-chested boys with mammal blood and thumping hearts and slick white bone, not salted shell or rough-scaled fin. Boys, who taste of youth and joy and fragrant grass on summer days. Boys who bravely dive from rusted pier to swelling tide, ignoring warning voices echoing on crested waves.

Sea takes.

Boy. Smallest boy. Sweet plump boy with fading breath and aching legs and fingertips that briefly touch then slip away. Boy, whose mother - just that morning - packed him rounds of buttered bread and apple cake and warned of vicious sea with riptide curl and unseen snarling teeth below. Smallest boy, with tiny final cry, drowned out by sound of beating mammal hearts and screams from voices on the cusp of breaking.

Sea leaves.

Boys. Two boys. Lithe-limbed boys with bare chests heaving, salted tears on milk-pale cheeks, standing deathly still on sharp-stoned shore. Boys who start to shiver, clammy cold together, as they watch the sea fret mist roll in to haunt their minds with guilt-soaked dreams, forever.