

Find Your Voice Teen Writing Contest

Finding Your Voice

By

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First Place

My breath catches on the final syllable of my song as a stick *snaps* behind the trees. I dive into the water, the calmness it usually offers doing nothing to temper the fear rising beneath my skin. Moments pass, but I don't hear the splash that always follows a life from this world, the bubbles that surround someone who flails for air they will never find. The guilt that washes over me is more familiar than any tide, one I hate with all my being. If only I could do something good, bring life with my song instead of end it. But I'll never know, because I'm trapped. I wait below the surface, feeling my heart race with overwhelming fear, until, slowly, longing drives me upward, out of the water. Barely registering my heart's choice, I break the surface, using a boulder's barnacled ledge to hold myself up. A shape moves along the shore, shadowless in the night. My breath stops again, this time from anticipation. I have not been to the "real world", as my kind call it. It is too dangerous for a siren to leave her home, and this small cove is the closest thing I can get to escaping what I was born into. I move to swim closer, but find myself pausing at a beautiful humming. The song is enchanting even without words, powerful and lulling, reminiscent of a lullaby and as enticing as a kiss. My throat tightens around the words of emotion that overflow within me, thus keeping the singer from the love and death that follow. The only time I feel like myself, when I feel like I'm living at all, is when I sing, but the life it brings me brings death to others. The humming becomes mournful to my ears, but it's luring me in nonetheless, not driving me back into darkness brimming with guilt. Before I realize my fear – and thus, safety – is dissipating, I'm swimming. Swimming to break the water, to reveal myself as who I am meant to be, not what I was born to be. My fluke sluices through the calm water, conjuring a whirlwind of bubbles that hastily float toward the surface; fish do their best to navigate around me as I pass, tangling in my hair as it floats around my face. I pause beneath the water, long fins swaying in the wave I created. I shouldn't be doing this. If they see me, they'll want to hear me sing. If I sing, they'll love me. They'll die. Something twists in my middle, and resolution settles heavily on my shoulders. What purpose is there, if not to be heard? Is there anything more foreboding than a looming eternity and a destiny one cannot change?

Without a second thought, I'm breaking the surface, moonlight splaying silver over the water, rippling from my ascent. I retake my place behind the rock, and seconds drag on, my heart practically leaping within me. My ears find the singer before my eyes do as the melancholy hum returns to haunt the air. My lips part, and I take a breath; with my voice, I end lives, yet my song revives me- and before I can stop it, I hear myself joining with the human's melody. I fill the song with my own sorrow; sorrow for all I am and how I am a prisoner to this life of loneliness. I fill the song with my own longing; longing for what is more and all I don't know because I am trapped and in pieces, and will never escape to find the other part of me.

"What are you?"

My note ends with a gasp, and it's all I can do to keep from immersing myself beneath the waters. I can only stare at the human standing on the shore. The crease of his brow is something I feel deep within, like akin spirits meeting in a way that words never could describe; his mouth is downturned, reflecting the sadness in his song.

"I'm a siren," I breathe, the words slipping off my tongue. Wonder shudders through me, my heart a thunderstorm in my chest. *How are you still speaking?* "You..." *You shouldn't be alive!*

The human laughs, a quiet, mournful sound. "A siren. But I'm not in love with you. And not dead. And here I thought there might be hope for me."

"Hope for you?" I scoff. *Humans have a hope I could never find.*

"Yes, me. A prophecy foretold I never would fall in love. At least here, in the cove of sirens, listening to your song, I could have died happily at least thinking I was in love, rather than afraid and alone."

Afraid? Alone? That's hardly a human's fate. They are merry, singing tunes of love and adventure beyond what they know. They gather and dance on swift legs and lift sweet voices. They huddle before fires, holding one another, whispering lovely words. They are together, and that makes them unafraid of whatever they might face.

"Sing for me."

The words follow the path of his gaze- they penetrate through me. I've waited my whole life to hear them. They reveal a wonderful reality: someone has heard me, lived to ask again, and sees me for who I am.

"Sing for me," the human repeats, jolting me from my reverie, "you sound beautiful. Perhaps it means there's something left in me if there is a companion to my song."

His words are an outstretched gift, and I cannot help but smile at the chance to take it. The one who enchants found the one who cannot be enchanted, and they make each other whole. I look to the human, whose downturned lips now hold a smile that lifts me from depths I've never left.

Until now.

I take in a breath, close my eyes, and *sing*. For the first time in my life, I find my voice.

THE END