

Story by Amber Forest

As the last firework exploded in a burst of blue light, Ariel whispered, “Magic.” Ariel. That’s my sister. My sister is a mad girl. A blue firework is not magic! Can’t tell her that though. She is stupidly sensitive and about as emotionally deep as someone who is stuck down a twelve foot hole because they didn’t look where they were going and fell in.

And I hate her. Not with passion. I have none of that for my sister. Ariel. I don’t see red. Not even the red hair of that bloody mermaid from Disney who is also called Ariel. No, Ariel - *her* hair is dull dead ash which drifts pathetically past her shoulders. She styles it crap. She doesn’t deserve them beautiful onyx locks.

What is—? No. Just no. “Ariel, what the bloody hell are you crying for?”. Blooming drama queen. Transparent tears so clear I can see right through her soul – why the hell? – no, I *cannot!*

I ain’t hallucinating this time. I sure wish I was. I’m loving my sister. I’m caring for her. I feel compassion to make her stronger, to understand her quirks, her thoughts, her feelings, her past. Oh fuck, I’m stuck. How long must this last? Oh shit, *stop it! I’m travelling there fast.*

Her pupils are dilating, soothing all my hating, she’s standing there waiting, in my mind I start debating whether I could be hallucinating. This is so frustrating; I’m walking towards her against my own will when I want to stand stubbornly still. I’m shrinking to the size of a feather. I climb up her short, cuddly body. Crawl through the tunnel her dilated pupils create and we’re together.

“Ring a ring a rosies, a pocket full of posies, Atishoo! Atishoo! *We all fall down!*”. Ouch! I hurt my bottom. I hope Ariel hasn’t hurt her bottom. Hold on, she hasn’t come down with me! “Ariel? You’ve got to fall down quicker than that. Are you scared you’ll hurt yourself? Shall I hold your hand this time?”.

I’m going to give Ariel a cuddle, she looks like she is on another planet and she has forgotten where she is. Her face and eyes are really strange. I don’t know how she feels. I hope she isn’t sad and scared.

“Ariel! I love you.” Ariel just pushes me away..... I’m really upset. My nose is snotty and runny and yuck. I want mummy. I’m crying and my face is all wet. Ariel is prancing up and down laughing at nothing. She never wants to play with me properly.

“*Mummy...!*”. Mummy is now coming. She is putting her arms around me and stroking my back. Mummy is talking quietly to me in her soft voice and it makes me feel warm inside. But I am still upset. “Tamsin, sweetheart, what’s the matter?”. “Ariel isn’t playing with me.” Mummy sighs and takes my hands away from my snotty wet face. Mummy is whispering softly to me. “Tamsin, what have I told you about your sister? What have I explained about Ariel? Eh?”.

Mummy’s big blue eyes are staring at me. I don’t want to talk about it. I reach out to touch her smooth chocolate milk skin... but she stops my hand. She wants to hold it. “Tamsin. Ariel has been playing with you for fifteen minutes. Yesterday, she didn’t play with you at all.”. But it’s not fair. “What are you thinking, sweetheart? Hmm? Tell mummy.”.

“Not fair.”. Oh no. I think I’ve made Mummy cross. She is looking at me in a way I don’t like.

I don’t like any way you look at me, bitch. *Great.* For once I mean that positively—my *normal* thoughts are coming back and so is the universe. The deathly pink playroom is turning to the

smudgy lead sky, the lawn like a scalp with several bald patches and few scatterings of tufty hair. The smell of smoke tickling my lungs and coiling through the air like a mass of curly hair.

Not a star in the sky. Good. They don't symbolise light. They symbolise blindness. Shining so stupidly bright, drawing unnecessary attention to themselves like little kids. So does optimism. Blind. Blind. Blind. Blind the mind.

My heart sank when I saw the person standing in front of me. My. Heart. Sank. That's the sort of stupid cliché she'd use. Ariel. Standing there gawping at me like a retarded dodo. Her heart sank. As in her heart is a little kid, her skeleton is a playground, her ribcage is the tunnel and her spine is the slide. The little kid crawled through the tunnel and went down the slide.