

## Pocket Venus

by Fran Duffield

If you were  
the Pocket Venus  
what was I, in our  
sideshow universe?

Perhaps then I was  
the Mermaid, swaddled, bound  
to a cardboard sea:  
a static tableau  
no tide could ever  
carry to another  
shore, or another love

The Strongman could carry  
you away, with just  
one hand, but  
it was you holding  
the power, cutting off  
his curling hair, when

you thought it was time,  
wrapping his torn  
lion skin, a trophy,  
around your golden hips

Perhaps I learnt,  
in the end, how to be  
the Bareback Rider,  
holding magically together  
two horses at once,  
without saddle or bridle,  
endlessly circling  
the sawdust ring  
to prove a pointless  
point

You were there  
to be admired,  
tiny but perfectly  
formed, honey voice,  
sea-green eyes  
fixed on the silver  
that they threw  
your way

I was an accident  
waiting to happen,  
waiting for the gasp  
of the crowd  
as I missed my footing,

slipping under  
the white belly  
of the ill-tempered horse,  
neither they nor I  
quite sure if it was a trick  
or a disaster

But the circus keeps  
moving on, and you and I  
with it, getting too  
old now for such  
acts and illusions:  
now it's time  
to fold away  
the sparkling costumes,  
clean off the make-up,  
as we both stare  
into the cracked mirror