

Tethered Lashes

by Paula Ray

Corina's skin is a circus tent. Her red-striped peppermint scars are a reminder of Christmas and family traditions. The obedient poodles of her childhood dreams jumped through hoops of fire until they became bald and grotesque. Poor dears, now, they no longer yap. They sometimes run across the sawdust floor of her silence and scratch to go out. Actually, all the animals and freaks want to go out, including the clowns, but even they are caged by costumes and makeup.

Corina wears feathers and pretends she can fly. She bites a dangling rope and spins like a ceiling fan. Alfredo, the tight-rope walker, is the only one who has ever gotten close to her, while she's mid-air. Once, he touched her. He reached out his warm palm and caressed her leg. She slowed down and goose-bumps erupted on her surface, as if all the happy children inside of her released their balloons at once and applauded.

She smiled that day. A genuine, unrehearsed smile. And for a moment, she opened her eyes and gave him permission to see behind the scenes. He's been teetering on a thread ever since.

