

No Mermaid Could Ever Sing

1.

Around me colour wells up
like the wind. Rich, thick,
careless brushstrokes
that are fish, float into the blank
space of my sight. The whirlpool
gathers me to its heart, and makes me dance
where no creature can live: this is
how I am born everyday, but not
how I came to be:

I rolled down in an egg-crust
a melting glacier had kept and got
tired of keeping, so it left me
to rest in a giant cave
hanging above the sea-bed.
*A dream hatched me: I dreamt
I was a fish
and so moved like one –*
Wetness filled my shell's
dark air as my fin broke free

and I melted into a world
I never made, warm and exhausted
from lives lived.

I learned to breathe water.
My voice vanished into little bubbles
and currents around the dark
pink coral that shudders
like a breathing jewel in the light.

This is what happened
to every woman who grew a fin.
So believe me, no mermaid could ever sing.

2.

No mermaid ever lured a sailor
to his doom with her song:
no mermaid could ever sing.
The sea's mystery lives in my silence.
Orphaned by the earth and air,
if I were to break the bond
that sustains me, where
would I be?

No mermaid could ever sing.
No mermaid sold to a witch
the voice she never had
for a pair of legs to walk the earth
in search of some man or sailor prince.

No mermaid could ever sing.
Ocean currents and the moon's pull
and the anger of floods I could
loosen from me and the earth
would be sea, but not the voice
I never had: I was woman once
but now I am half-woman, half-fish.
No mermaid could ever sing.
The sea's mystery lives in my silence,
in my cutting cold fin.
My voice is a memory
lost in the water, the wind.

Archana Sahni