

When I Die, Please Donate My Legs to a Mermaid

CIONA ROUSE

When she decides she's done
outswimming sharks and squinting
her eyes in celebration of
seahorse babies popping
from their daddies' bellies.

When she wants to chase the other side
of a rainbow that's swallowed up by
green as far as her eyes can see. When she falls
in language with a person.

No more arias, no more chasing flutes
with her tone. When she wants to moan
and sweat and tire. When she wants to vine
her legs among her lover's at the blue hour
and ask a question too serious for sunrise
like sometimes lovers do.

And, yes, maybe the scar on her stomach
will be thick and unsexy. Yes, she will wear

braids of red on her skin where she loses her
fin and stretches into these thighs, these knees
that some mornings need me to fold them
and shake them and breathe into them
before they work. And, yes, she may
find they have scrapes and a dark spot
still dry-ish from an almost-rash I moisturized
toward healing.

But she will have choice. And the ability
to express with voice no matter
if a man decides to love her back.
And if you need, you can freeze
my arms and clavicle,
put my ears and pinky fingers on ice
Whatever part of me—gall, gut, nerves—
I offer it when I leave
if it means a woman may be
on this land and speaking.

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