

The Catch

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Figurehead

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Figurehead

Yes, I am a mermaid hung to view
in this museum where every one of you
may come and gawk and then inquire if I
was real—this “freak” left hanging here on high.
I *was* real, and I *am*. You doubt my scales
and wonder at my bifurcated tails,
but you must recognize that far from land
are many things you do not understand.

If you would put me back into the sea,
you would discover how I’m meant to be:
a force to part the waves, ensure advance;
a power who with Neptune dares to dance;
a sailor’s dream, all full of breasts and smiles,
who through the watery wastes his way beguiles.
You cannot know how much a sailor’s love
attaches to what I remind him of.

But more—when storms erupt, roiling the deep,
and fierce winds through the ripped-loose rigging sweep;
when lightning splits the masts, and thunder’s peal
denounces every ship that dares to sail,
I am the war-maid who breaks up the waves
and saves the sailors from deep-under graves.
So look with skepticism if you dare,
but if you sail, don’t leave me hanging here.