

A Flash Of Silver

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I spot her in the distance, a bobbing buoy in an azure sea. There are just a handful of people on the beach, and no-one else out in the water. I shade my eyes with both hands: the sun is low in the sky, casting little warmth but creating countless glass tips as the ocean heaves and hauls in the wind, alive and brutal.

I take a deep breath. Before I can change my mind, I strip to my shorts and begin walking, jogging, then sprinting towards the breaking waves. Under my bare feet, the sand turns from a crumbling, unsteady carpet to hard wet ridges. I don't break step, throwing up plumes of water.

I dive in.

The cold arrests my breath. Blood retreats from my extremities, its warmth and energy diverting to my heart, keeping it beating. It's all I can do to move my arms and propel my legs, blinking away the sting of the salt. I have forgotten everything I know and find myself at the mercy of the current. I float ever further from the shore, cleaving madly against the powerful pull and push of the tide.

Despite my energetic strokes, I am no warmer and the icy water saps what little strength I have. She watches my approach: curious and cautious. Each time I break the surface, drawing in noisy lungfuls of air, she appears tantalisingly closer. She barely makes a splash as she sweeps the water before her, as serene as I am clumsy.

Like a modern-day Neptune, I am borne aloft on a huge wave rolling back with a powerful rush. It deposits me next to her. I open my mouth, but my salt-burned throat and jagged breath kill the words I want to say. I am spent, with just enough strength to silently float beside her.

Her dreadlocked hair, tumbling kelp, falls about me. Her skin is the colour of coral. Her eyes are inky pools. She drifts around me, circling, coming in and out of my view. I flip over, treading water. Her lips part and a haunting song fills the air. The otherworldly melody is audible over the crash and creak of the sea, which has now become even more choppy. I am entranced. Our fingers intertwine, bodies pull forward and her mouth seeks mine. We kiss. The taste of brine, the tang of ozone. As the waves roll and break, the gulls overhead wheel and scream.

An alien sound breaks the enchantment. Like startled fish, we break away. The sound beckons again, echoing around us. I see something – someone – further out in the water. The dying notes of her song drift back in the wind. I call out, but she is already several lengths away. I try to follow, but my limbs are unresponsive, leaden.

She gazes over her shoulder at me, one final time. Then a flash of silver, as she heads for the horizon, embraced by the dancing, glittering, mocking waves.

I drown in her wake.

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