

## **This Is Not A Love Poem**

by Joanna Parypinski

I lived in a cave of ice, cold-minded and blue  
as a fish  
breathing in the Neptunian deep,  
while moonlight played like water on the walls.  
Twilit fantasies  
of twined fins, or fingers, pricked the mind's eye  
like dust on a camera lens.  
I was a half-aquatic Fish-Woman,  
mermaid of the cosmic sea  
who prayed to the Blind Mad God  
and the blind Fortuna  
and the black-hole whirlpool Charybdis  
at the center of the universe.

I found love in a bottle of vodka,  
  
blood burning liquor lacquered smooth  
the sharp edges of my marble heart.

I found love in rusty bones and broken shells  
abandoned on the shore.

I started to think:  
is it not better to be the huntress Artemis,  
a lone wolf,  
or drift, Ophelia-like, wreathed in rosemary,  
and sink?

I learned to swim  
when everyone paired off to board the Ark,  
tread amphibious circles  
then dove in cold and salt and sand

while the others left behind crawled  
onto dry land.

Miles deep, I learned to love the song of solitude,

and I found love in shattered pencil-tips  
driven stake-like through my beating heart.

I know the crawlers,  
warm with fur, will say:

the mermaid protests too much,  
they'll say, she protests too much.

Artemis said she'd never fall in love;  
then she met Orion  
and hung him in the stars.

I said I'd rather be a fish than a star,  
trapped beneath the arctic ice,  
unlooked-for, unwished-upon,  
unreachable  
in sea or space. But sometimes  
when the glaciers melt,  
and Fortune's water-wheel spins me to the surface  
of the universe,

I look to the blazing sky, amazed and  
I find love in the constellations.