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.