

Okkervil River

"Mermaid"

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So I said, "Men, pull her out of the water.
And then lay on hands,
and bind back her flippers and tail
until international waters. And there we'll feel
what's human inside of her."

So she's chilly and slick
on her hips where the scales
meet with skin. With a sickening
flick of her tail, circling,
her gills fill with cold, salty water. She thrashes
and twirls, her freezing fins fluttering.

And she's pretty, I think,
with her hair dark as ink, and her belly bone-white.
And her lips, of a slight, sea-shell pink, slightly part
as she's tonguing the tub's rusty rim,
as the saltwater flows out and in.

All farewells to the land we knew well
we'd never be touching again.
To the fields where we rambled and ran.
Farewell to our wives and children.
Let's stand on the deck and let's watch
them all disappearing.

And the days all float by
in a daze, over waves, under sky.
And the weeks slowly leak into years.
The last islands are all left behind as we silently sail.
Until late some dark night, a wild wind starts to wail.

And our map blows away.
And our compasses fail.
And it's out on the lost boiling black water
where I see her float out.
And she's so thin and so pale. I see her rise up.
And she's so fast and so fair. My hands meet,
and they press to a point in the air,
but my mouth fills with more panic than prayer.
And my skull fills with more color than care.

And my heart fills with love, with too much love to bear.
And I know that I'll stay, and that she'll always be there,
my hands sunk in cold sand,
sea-weed strung through her hair.

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