

“You Can Either be My Lovely or My Fishy”

by

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You can either be my lovely or my fishy.

If you are my lovely, I will crown you with painted glass and sunlight and you shall shine like the virgin. I will lick you in place to the high palisade wall and you will become the sentinel of the church. Your arms will be fixed, nailed to the stone so that you can better accept my love. Your eyes will be gouged out with thorns so you can sharpen your other senses to anticipate when a hidden army is creeping up to destroy me. Your feet will be bare and embedded with the shrapnel and the dirt that seeps out of the soul's corners in plumes. And you shall be my oracle. *Yes, the barbarians are coming. No, he does not love you. Yes, you're pregnant.* You will be my protector, each of your bruises signifying each attack that you have successfully deflected. And at the end of the day, when I take you down and you bend your fingers and move your cramped legs and arms, I will show you how clean I still am. The barbarian's spear will not have touched me, the chamomile petal will not have poisoned me, and the blood on the operating table will reek of knives and death, not of cameras and life. You will see that I have lived yet another day. And you still will survive, the wounds collecting on your body. Don't worry, my lovely. You will have the night to heal; the moon, the stars, and the biting wind as your balms and bandages. And when black turns to grey, I will come out and carry you to your place on the wall again.

If you are my fishy, you must breathe water and algae. You must learn to forget air and legs. You will see earth and sky through a glass surface; touch it and it will tremble but not break. You must learn to remember to take bigger mouthfuls and to keep the water from running from your ears and nose. Your skin will turn to smooth green, the pruney fingertips wearing down to fins, the nails peeling off. You will forget words, your memory will fail, and your eyes will lose their shine. You will forget how to love. You will forget that you were once human.