

JANE (HAMILTON) SILCOTT / Vertigo

One step, that's all. She toes closer to the edge, baby gibbling in her arms, the sea below shimmering like some ordinary day. Divers pop their heads up in a school, like fish. One of them waves, setting off an attack of vertigo as if his hand is the tail of a serpent, flicking. Or would that be a merman tail, seeing as it's come from a man in the sea?

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As the baby falls from her arms, she falls with it, her feet leaving the rock as simply and obviously as her heart spinning in its cage. Spikes of blood shimmer in the air around her. The sun is rising, or is it because she's falling? Everything else looks up. It's gold and orange and blue the way a flame looks. Below her the sea flares then settles. In the middle something black. A stone or a seal? But she is in another world now and she hasn't felt a thing. In her mind sealmen looking up, their eyes like O's.

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His skin so smooth, like a plate presented at her door.

May I come in?

You don't have to.

I don't.

No.

Yes.

His chest concave. Smooth. Dish. The baby turns into a bird opening in her chest, its wings pressing out and out and out in a flare of white. A peacock with orange eyes. He showed her bumps on his hands from strained ligaments. Quills. Pain. His face across the table the same as it's always been.

We could get married, he said, his voice shivery with sea. You'd have to work more, she answered. Salt on his tongue. She ate slivers of fish with Tabasco sauce and chilli powder. Red sprinkled on silver and black. Just a seed, he said, the bright air between them, his eyes the colour of glacial streams.

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She swims in pools of blue. Hot blue with shards of glass. Waves of light cross and cancel each other out making darkness. She falls in the slits between. He closes over her, tying knots inside and out, so there are no escaping patterns, just birds and babies flying past in the pieces of fraught light. She feels him in hot drafts of air underwing. Light and silvery. The sea below shivery with flickers of white and grey. The rocks. Waving.

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He said in these times of falling, envelopes of space open and you can see time in them.

I saw you, he said.

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Her arms stop. The baby smiles. Home. Light shivers on water. Waves spill inside and through her. The men clap as she surfaces, a sharp slapping of skin on skin, soft licking of water on fin, happy gurgling of baby swimming toward her.

Fish, baby says. I saw a fish.