

## **Metamorpho...**

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These days, Tyro sits in the shade. She has a favourite spot in the lee of a tumble of rocks, in a tent of shadow shaped perfectly to her body, back still straight, knees drawn up under her chin. Holiday makers with whom she shares the beach don't notice her. The plait resting along her vertebrae is the same schist grey as the rock and her skin has the dusty glitter of sand. Her gaze takes no account of delighted babies tottering in the shallows or teenagers flirting over beach volleyball. She seems not to hear waiters taking orders for cocktails or the Vietnamese reflexologist who hobbles, every Friday, among the deckchairs, offering foot massages, her own feet in their plastic sandals cracked and warped.

Tyro looks out to sea. She looks beyond the bobbing margin of paddlers and fair weather swimmers, beyond the horizon where container ships queue to enter the neighbouring port, to the vast and empty spaces where dreams may flourish or founder. Once these were Tyro's dreams, once the dreams of the Vietnamese reflexologist. These days, dreams are sometimes found washed up on the beach in torn life jackets or staggering like drunks along the littoral.

Tyro's eyes are the colour of the sea, sometimes a depthless indigo, sometimes milky and vague, sometimes a glittering sapphire you can't look at without sunglasses. Tyro has the sea inside and she knows just how that feels, the lilt and lurch of it, the way it throws you off balance. The way it rages against confinement, tearing canvas and splintering wood. The apprehension of death in your throat.

The sea tolerates no dreams but its own.

A sand fly alights on Tyro's arm. She brushes it away, feeling beneath her fingers the scaliness of her weathered flesh. Even in winter she's drawn to the beach, even when the wind spins foam off the tops of the waves and sandblasts her skin. When it's colder than she can imagine now, besieged in her triangle of shade, and the sea is deserted by even the most

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courageous and persistent dreams. She walks its ragged edges in wellington boots and a woollen shawl. The wind panders to it, unbraiding her hair and pushing her skirt between her legs, displaying her to the waves. The sea's vigorous tongues lick up her calves, lift her hem, poke inside her boots, unwind her shawl.

But, no, she says, not yet. Next time, I will come of my own free will and not just because you command it. Your tides no longer govern me. She thinks of her sons, her twins. The one who fights wars. The one who builds cities. These men she has never seen, who are nothing but echoes, now, in her empty womb. Even so, she would give her life for them, but not her self. They never possessed her; no man has ever possessed her. She wonders if they think of themselves as orphans.

Yet their father has tossed them in the air and dandled them in his lap, has meted out cautions and lullabies, protection and challenges in the measure they were needed. He has provided food for the table and stories for the fireside. Even though she doesn't know where they are now, she thinks it likely he does, and watches over them still. She hears things sometimes, on the radio news to which she listens drowsily when she can't sleep, snatches of phrases which crystallise in her mind and make her think, ah, yes, that's him. That's them. The one who fights wars, the one who builds cities.

Winter is hard. The hills charred by summer's wildfires green only briefly before the frost sets in. The cold embrittles Tyro's bones; she huddles by her stove and feels them crack beneath her rugs and sweaters, beneath her scaly skin. Away from the heat cast by the stove her breath condenses on the air, occluding her vision as she washes her face or chops vegetables. One day her knife slips and she cuts her finger; licking away the salty blood she feels something draining away from her. I have become a leaky vessel, she thinks.

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She doesn't dress her wound, she doesn't take her coat or boots as she leaves, she doesn't even lock her door. Her neighbours, when they come to investigate, will find the half chopped vegetables sparkling with frost, the coat stiffened on its hook. They will find the knife with its rime of rusty blood, and a few spots staining the floorboards.

But the trail goes cold at Tyro's doorstep because the exhausted earth laps up what she leaves for it on her journey to the sea.

Alright, she says, the froth of waves between her toes, I'm ready. She takes off her clothes, not hurriedly but with care, unfastening every button, sliding each zip to its limit, and the sea waits. We're not as young as we were, she says, offering her body to the sea's embrace, feeling it warm her bones, feeling its salt lick in her slit finger. The sea curls over her with a languid, viscous passion, and takes her to himself.

*In Greek mythology, Tyro was raped by Poseidon and bore him twin sons one of whom, Neleus, is credited with the founding of Pylos.*