



Cynthia Marie Hoffman

The Protocol Speaks to the Mermaid Baby

You kick as if it were the sheet that made this white wave
you cannot break free from, but it is your own body
that binds your legs in a sleeve of skin. Sleek, cylindrical,
aquatic. The brittle thread that fastens your bones. This crib
is an island. There are some doctors who will take to the legs
with a knife, but they are not your doctors. Go ahead and wail
your song of sirenornelia. Do you want your legs split?
Do you want to walk? Do you know what walking is?
Where is your flowing golden hair? What will you do
with the third chamber of your heart? The emptiness
between your hips no one can fill with all its missing human
things. Open your eyes to the glare of the world. Your moist
amphibian eyes. You understand we must let you die. There is
little time and what has the world given you but flipper feet
so go ahead and flip. The incubator hums like a submarine.
Let's you and I make a pact. I will be the protocol and you will be
the mermaid baby. No one must be anything but what they are.

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