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Oyster Bones

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Oyster Bones

They found her tangled in the tinsel of the salt-soaked sea. They, being the fisherman and his saggy basset, were folding foot shapes into the brown sugar sand as the earth skipped the sun across the sky. Her skin was oyster smooth fading at the waist to rows of spade-shaped scales covering her fish-tail. Pearly luminescent eyes stared, drained and empty (wide open). Long knotted hair braided like ship rope with tiny shells interwoven reached out like deflated octopus arms. Her tiny purple lips gaped revealing tiny pointy teeth. The fisherman nudged the basset's curious jaw from her collapsed filmy fins, unfolded his steely blade and freed the mermaid from the tinsel of the salt-soaked sea. He draped her round his shoulders, her tail flopping faintly against his stride.

“Look.” He commanded the townspeople amid the coral trinkets, algae gel, and sea-meat stalls as he flung her down where she made a soft squelch against the fish-juice damp dirt. Old women smacked their tongues against their soft teeth. Young men felt their hearts waver as if tickled by a wave and forced their tiny tsunamis back as their eyes swam down the mermaid's body. The children whose mothers didn't catch quick enough to hold them back first poked her pallid skin, then braver slid a finger down her long tail, squealing at the slimy scales. One boy braver than the rest prodded her right pearly eye then shoved it through. He yelped and the children screamed at the squelching pop as her broken eye oozed.

They came with their tight coats and silver tools. They, being the local panoply of doctors and scientists, surrounded her and all at once began. Some sketched. Some measured her fingers, fins, tail, gills, nose—everything. Then, they began the dissection. With precise steady cuts they opened her chest cavity and plucked her heart like a pearl from an oyster. They bottled her liver, kidneys, stomach, ovaries, and intestines in yellow formaldehyde. Next they yanked her teeth from her gaping mouth leaving her gray-gummed and cherry blood-lipped. They cut down the length of her tail and studied the fleshy muscles. They took samples of scales, skin, and hair. They cracked her head and scooped the brain from her skull and then, after studying, examining, and dissecting her, they left the empty mutilated carcass amid rotting fish guts where seagulls pecked off the moist-pink flesh till nothing was left but oyster-white

bones.

— Danielle Favorite