

Susan Brennan



Yemaya

Not a blond fish-girl who coos at sailors
but a burnt umber skinned creature
flint nipples like black pearls
thalo blue tail that thrashes
like a tongue, muscles her a coarse
across blabbering waves.
Sailors pray as she claws
up the stern, tips the ship
from the weight of her forty foot fin.

I didn't know who I was praying to —
the candle I bought at the Santeria bodega —
all the poems I couldn't write —
I didn't know she would surge up, black waters
cold on her breath, black waters in tears
like welts down her throat and sternum
her hair, briny dreads
the ocean surface, a gape of suction
as she pulled her salt wind limbs into full amphibious nature
dragging the oxygen out from my lungs —

I swam like hell, held her down
beneath my belly's shore line
but foam cusped at my heels in the supermarket,
waves licked up sidewalks, seaweed sprouted out ceiling tiles at the office
and she spat, hissed
a constant froth at my own lips.
The bathroom sink, green with morning,
I began to cough up shells, bits of iridescent scales —
she had me from the inside, Lady of the Undertow,

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Calabash

wash me from the wrecks I have built
bring me the dark star-filled lover, the teased
lantern fish, their light liquid in wet silk rhapsodies of currents.
Sea witch, raise your sure sea star hand
to my third eye, that shy oyster, I pray,
loosen the moon.

