



## A Fable from Loners' Island

Mermaid surfaced, wavelets lapping where silky skin turned silvery scale. Held whole by the sea, Mermaid was drawn by the land. Her Island. At the very heart of the ocean. Times too many to count, she'd risen from the depths to watch sunshimmer waves nuzzle sea cliffs. She'd ridden on wild breakers when lightning thundered around rocks as sharp as her teeth. She'd dived cold fathoms to where earth anchored on sea floor, and she'd flip to follow the rising land, faster and faster until she flowed like a dolphin into sea breeze

too many times she fell back to the sea

Her Island was mutable, beautifully, unknowably so. She would gaze and click her long nails delightedly as mountains smoothed to placid lagoons, seething lava became lush plains. She'd search the sea-bed for the painted stones sometimes carried downstream by lazy rivers. And she'd swooped through the water with joy when a solitary treetrunk appeared carved into fantastical faces. When scudding clouds patterned the landscape fleeting forms seemed to cling to surfaces - although she could never be certain. But of one thing she was sure

her Island was the most magical place in creation

One calm morning a new cove appeared, outstretched headlands welcoming her into waters twinkling with quartz. She swam closer, seeing rock pools, pebbles, soft golden beach - and a long line of somethings strewn between shore end and land. Mermaid longed to reach them, but once in the shallows her tail became heavy, the sun burnt her skin

she had to turn back

Next day started stormy but the cove, deluged and gale-lashed, was still there. Elated, she tumbled from whitecaps, took risks in the undertow, passed foam-covered headlands. But rising behind her huge waves rumbled in. Growing and growing, the biggest lengthened and spread, and catching up Mermaid dashed her far up the shore, at highest tide line

on her Island at last

Mermaid sat on the high water mark, playing with raindrops pelting down from the sky. But as the storm moved away the hot sun came out, baking and bleaching, raising salted sea smells. Mermaid knew she must leave, so she heaved with her arms, dragged her tail a small distance. The cooling blue water glistened - a long way away. She twisted and fought, tried to roll over, but her tail wasn't meant to swim on the land. Above and around gulls were swooping and diving, and she thought how she'd flown and soared in the sea. Then, borne on the breeze, came the scent of tide turn... But Mermaid was drying, scales loosening, skin dulling

too much sun to patiently wait

Below sand would be cooler so she had to dig down. Just under the surface her nails scratched a hard object - a slender bird bone emerged - a piece of bleached beauty. And at once she recalled somethings seen from the sea

amongst weed strands and debris, objects appear

Again muscles heave but this time in searching, hands scrape between scallops, driftwood, and rope. Tail twists, nails prise loose, spying shards of pale yellow, three crumbs of orange, a whole number of blues. Deep, deeper she burrows, finding fragments of rainbow, a clutch of reflections, a lacework of thought. Combing and raking scouring and hunting spotting and wrenching and bringing to light now knowing so knowing all must be sought out

and the tide creeps in shorewards

So the treasure trove grows, things jangle and squash. Mermaid starts to arrange them, puts this one with that, discards, finds another that fits in just right

as the sun starts to set

Until all of her favourites lie out on the shore

then sea tickles her tail

She's reminded of home.

Quickly weaving a net from seaweed and rope, Mermaid gathered her prizes, returned to the sea. But, as coolness soaked through her, the tide began circling, like anemone fronds, then unyielding, determined, bay water maelstroms so strong and relentless and Mermaid a fleck in the ocean of swirlings whirled faster and faster in surgings and -

the sea takes a breath

Jets out a huge fountain. Mermaid shimmers on spray crest as perfect as pearls. Below is her Island, a great shout in space - illumined and gilded by rays of the day. She's in a new place that she couldn't have dreamed. Inside her net soft sighings are gathering, evolve into pulsebeats, her objects awake. High in the sky she sets free her treasures, all scatter to soar, or feather-fall landwards, now captured by dusklight they glisten and gleam. On the crown of the fountain some surround her like fireflies, give her her voice

and she sings

Moral: Appreciate what's around you and it will take you somewhere else.