

# Washed Up

by Katrina Dessavre

At noon on a weekday in the off season, when the trickle of tourists who wandered into the Mermaid Curio Shoppe had died out completely, she walked in with wet hair, leaving tiny puddles on the floorboards. Everything interested her: the cameos, coconut lamps, fish scale pins, sea plumes, snakeskin belts, and shell necklaces. She picked things up and put them down. She stood in front of the old diver's suit, slumped in a chair, and ran her long, acrylic nails over its threadbare surface. As she got closer to the register, I noticed her tattoos were starting to warp on sagging skin. She adjusted her denim shorts over orange-brown legs rippled by cellulite.

"Can I help you?"

She took out a bottle of eye drops from her purse and leaned her head back.

"You look familiar," I continued. "Don't I know you from somewhere?"

She wiped her eyes and looked at me, blinking heavily. Her face was smooth, like a fish scale.

"I was on a singing show a while back."

"How did that work out?"

"I didn't get past the second round. I sing on a cruise ship now."

She started drumming her nails on the counter. I thought I could smell brandy on her breath.

"Listen, you know that diver suit?"

"Yeah."

"Do you mind if I try it on for a minute?"

What could I say? She untied the rope that held the suit in a sitting position and climbed into the rubber legs with ease. The thing hadn't been worn properly since the early '40s, when sea sponges disappeared from Tarpon Springs and the divers' suits became useless novelties.

"Just pretend I'm not here," she said and put the helmet on.

Her breathing reverberated inside the brass dome and came out as a shallow hiss, interrupted, after an uncomfortable few minutes, by the sound of an engine running outside the shop. It was a white pick-up truck with a faded sticker of the confederate flag on its side.

The driver knocked over a line of seashells on his way to the register.

"Have you seen my wife? Red hair, probably smells like brandy?"

"I'm afraid not. It's been quiet all day."

He looked at the suit.

"Where'd you get that?" he asked.

"It just washed up," I said.

