

Chris Dahl

The Cat Who Was a Turtle

While she was sleeping on her side some trickster embellished her mid-section with a round cushion so she dreamed she was a dome-backed turtle, self-contained, deliberate. She could withdraw and hide, safe within herself.

She dreamt of underwater landscapes, murky and mysterious, now explorable. Traveling on stumpy legs, she maneuvered amid algae-scummed boulders and towering strands of weeds

then drifted through the muzzy, green matrix. Here and there sunlight toyed with quartz from a broken boulder. Ripples, spawned by a fallen leaf, spread in concentric circles, a halo overhead. It was a new life but not a bad life. When she clambered onto a log, the sun warmed her back.

And yet when she woke there was no hesitation in shaking off the fake shell, sharpening claws on the nearest upholstery then sauntering through the open door. Because a turtle, after all, is an artifact of her shell. While a cat, being what she is, is an avatar of a goddess.