First having read the book of myths, and loaded the camera, and checked the edge of the knife-blade, I put on the body-armor of black rubber the absurd flippers the grave and awkward mask. I am having to do this not like Cousteau with his sandcastle team aboard the sun-flooded schooner but here alone.

There is a ladder. The ladder is always there hanging innocently close to the side of the schooner. We know what it is for, we who have used it. Otherwise it is a piece of maritime loss some sundry equipment.

I go down. Rung after rung and still the oxygen immerses me the blue light the clear atoms of our human air. I go down. My flippers cripple me, I crawl like an insect down the ladder and there is no one to tell me when the ocean will begin.

First the air is blue and then it is blur and then green and then black I am blacking out and yet my mask is powerful it pumps my blood with power the sea is another story the sea is not a question of power I have to learn alone to turn my body without force in the deep element.

And now: it is easy to forget what I came for among so many who have always lived here swaying their crenellated fans between the reefs and besides you breathe differently down here.

I came to explore the wreck. The words are purposes. The words are maps. I came to see the damage that was done and the treasures that prevail. I stroke the beam of my lamp slowly along the flank of something more permanent than fish or weed the thing I came for: the wreck and not the story of the wreck the thing itself and not the myth the drowned face always staring toward the sun the evidence of damage worn by salt and sway into this threadbare beauty the ribs of the disaster curving their assertion among the tentative haunters.

This is the place. And I am here, the mermaid whose dark hair streams black, the merman in his armored body. We circle silently about the wreck we dive into the hold. I am she. I am he whose drowned face sleeps with open eyes whose breasts still bear the stress whose silver, copper, vermeil cargo lies obscurely inside barrels half-wedged and left to rot we are the half-destroyed instruments that once held to a course the water-eaten log the fouled compass

We are, I am, you are by cowardice or courage the one who find our way back to this scene carrying a knife, a camera a book of myths in which our names do not appear.

Diving into the Wreck

Adrienne Rich, 1929 - 2012