

Jane Southwell Munro / FIVE POEMS

ROMANCE

Falling in love with him pulled me
out of myself like pulling a wet hand

out of a leaking rubber glove.
I would say it had nothing to do with him —

the glove fell away from my grasp, inside out.
He seized upon a woman I hadn't allowed myself to be.

Snake drops its former cover, crumpled scab.
I'd say it wasn't him I needed, but me.

Snake splits when it's ready, naturally.
Falling in love with him did what seeing mystic lights,

listening to good advice, reading novels
hadn't accomplished. That wildness.

Of course it had to do with him. We flew
out of wet gloves, bare hands gesturing.

Have you seen D'Sonoqua's mask, Old Woman of the Woods?
Falling in love, I paid tribute to a cannibal spirit.

Little piles of gloves: marigold, pink, yellow
in the forest below her white face, her mouth like an O.

HELICOPTER BY THE LAKE

Its blades turn invisible,
but their chop
has destroyed the membrane
in which she'd closed his voice.
His drumming in her thoughts
is gone, though little pulses of his intonations
still peak and fall through her skin.
The air oscillates
between her and the metal dragonfly.
Pentecostal, a wordless conversational uproar
transports her attention.
The lake's batiked crinkle
crumples with waves.

Waves from the rotor, waves from the wind,
waves from the moon and sun and passing boats
subside. Still, there's no silence.
Not that she's listening for silence.
She's trying to hear the future, and thinks silence
might help, but what she keeps listening to is him.
His eyes close; hers stay open.
A man's purr as he almost snores,
her ear on his clavicle.

He never finished his story
— it disintegrated in the event —
suggesting accident, perhaps a precedent.
A glinting little worry she lets wing away
as the helicopter darts across the lake.
No whirlwind lifted her from the grassy shore
— chances are, she won't fly over the rainbow —
and indeed, she can no longer sense that roar.

IT'S IN THE KITCHEN

mostly I hear music
while we're eating dinner
or fixing food
all the sensual pleasures
towards the end of day
set my hips to circling
fingertips converting
keyboard chop
how the final measure drops right off

now if I could counterpoint
here amidst the line
some fancy sister's pyrotechnics
you'd listen to the melody's sequins swing
and then that long wry stabbed-heart plea
she sings — a good man, she claims
is hard
to find

coming or going
she's got a handy man, handy
with the stride
of opposites
his left hand, sometimes slighted, stomping her
rocks across two octaves
lifts a saxophone elegy, its full hunger
love, she sings again, is a child believing

oom-pah below the tinkling
picked bones shimmy

we're cooking in the kitchen
garlic smoking
slicing zukes and cukes, mixing
me, myself and I licked off a finger
leaves above the eaves, and a child out in the garden
singing the blues and crying
where peaches hang like globes of honey
along branches of an orchard in a darkened heaven
plums, gleaming like aubergines
become the jam of this year's kisses
to have found your place on earth
no, no, they can't take that away from me

deep rhythm captivates me
it's not just the tension
of swing, curve of a horn
deep in the centre of jazz as it's sounding
is sweet confirmation
we're human, honey
swaying and cooking
regrets syncopated — it's that little delay
without your love
that's not quite safe
lordy, how it wrinkles the mind
we're funny that way

FISHING SONNET

Eating perfectly sauced red snapper, curled improbably in
boneless rosettes

instead of waiting for dusk, rowing along the cliff,
trolling a line until it tenses: yanks heavy.

You've been out there day after day, trailing your pole,
burning in the sun, idling, shifting, paddling along.

You cast, dawdle, jig — diddle the layers of deep water

in which things invisible live: your flimsy line, the plumb
seals, the canny finned flock

— but this evening, a hidden fish pulling on your wrists,

its struggle echoes in your belly. Rod bowed, one end wedged
against your hip, the other scribbling across the lip of air
pulled back from bare water,

and then: so alive: the quick flipping body:

twitching — flopping over aluminum frets across the bottom of
the boat. At your feet

as you catch another. Another. Five red snappers. Mouths
sucking air. Club each fish but it slips, jumps again.

Chill as you rip the cord to start the motor. Noise. Noise.
And the beach boulders bang, your shoes and cuffs soaked

in the cold water. Clean them fast. Slit, scrape, the bloody
back bones still alive. Fish nerves. You know someone with
such nerve. Almost, the fillets leap.

Cook them by lantern light.

With each bite, sweet greenish flesh of ocean tinged with
slaughter, your throat too tense for conversation.

DREAM TIGER

A woman confronts his liberties
in her conversation with the houseguest,
this night's tiger.

His stripes simply won't stay put — they detach,
rippling on the air's current, permitting
risk to permeate the dining room.
If he were not, clearly, a tiger
she'd swear he was a man, one elbow on the table
twisting a glass of dark wine
while teasing her limits. Without her permission
the tiger takes charge
and begins his dream of a woman.

She persists in a kind of politeness, obliquely
presiding over him, the meal
and some pretty children.
“A spoon for the cream? Child, you may be excused.”
Wainscoting boxes the room at their backs.
The stained walnut reeks
with contained smoke. Wary, she changes her face
and that is enough to gentle his approach.
Evening inhales; she proposes: “Bring your port —
let us continue in the living room,”
then stands purposefully, shedding felted air.

Her proper guests wait
like fixtures, in the next room —
these unknown friends she must have fed.
A dress, in fact a gown, slides on her thighs.
She notices its drape from her bosom.
So, this was long ago, this conjunction.
She is allowed Edwardian skin for it
and milk-breasts. She is allowed
a needle-point settee and another man
whose eyes doze behind fronds of twilight.
A man asleep in a wool suit,
like a northern lake. She is allowed
to rest on his surface, break her flight
for a few sips of coffee.

The tiger enters to brood over his hostess.
She lifts away, flushed from the unsuitable couch,
tries the door. The wake of her party
rises after her. Pushed from behind,
she bursts onto the patio, but the others
can't fit through the shrinking frame.

The tiger is already outside. She senses
there's been some preparation
she overlooked, a menu for the night
which might explain
why she's followed him.
While the woman combs his dream, the tiger,
with his rough tongue, licks
a constellation clean.

It remains unaccountable
this wish she has to lean
full-length against him
enfolded in his tresses, his risky stripes,
as this night's tiger rises
through the dark houses of the sky.

