



MARTHA SPRACKLAND

ON SHARKS

MINERVA / SERIES I: MATERIALS

I WAS A SEAHORSE

TRICKSTERS SHARK AND SELKIE

from LOVE SONGS TO THE SHARK

INSTRUCTIONS



I was a seahorse

When the shark first came to me I was drifting
in the shallows, anxious
in the plunging streaks of bubbly light
like leaves all dancing before a storm
it was life to bob and travel around the kelp
plucking at everything with my lips
and to tuck myself into a crevice
when the dark fell through the water
but by instinct, not by anything learned.
I was so pretty you could dry me out
and put me on a bathroom windowsill
with shells and potpourri
and a severed crab claw
and a shark's tooth from a gift shop
and a decorative sponge made from foamed
plastic polymers

Tricksters Shark and Selkie

Shark won't be fooled by the lure
in sealskin black towed behind the motorboat
with rigid tail and fins and rough-cut head
and smell of jelutong and engine oil.
But keeps them on their toes and trails the rig
at half a mile, using the skyscraper stands of kelp
as back-alley and shadow, one eye turned away
to hide the gleam. Then silent coming on again
until the sea's pellucid depths are changed to dark
like ink or blood in water, a plume
dropped in and left to mix and settle into black.
On deck, the men zip up and check the gear.
They slither in and swim to check the lure
which should be skidding gently in the ebbing wake.
A piece of sea breaks off and muscles into view.
The brawny seal with hook and hawser dripping in its mouth.
The men turn, perplexed, and tread the water into silver chains.
The fin jags in with something like regret.

The boat, the phony little boat cut out from wood,
is pulled along unrepentantly under the moon.

[from] Love Songs to the Shark

dear native mako, my silken shark,
I have brought you something raw to bite,
as bait, to tear and cut so beautifully
into pieces as I have loved
the lead flashing of your teeth
the silvering they leave,
my half-healed hurts, the way you change my skin,
the way you come to me at night
 with the moon
on the sea like a bedsheet over a sleeping body
& I have seen you cruise from nowhere sportscar-sleek
black headlamps and panelling in brilliant blue
& have had you eye me slant – yes, like that –
your favour is unconditional death. I have felt so beloved.

I have been jolted as you pass me on the turn
and every time swing away into vanishing
I have been rocked by the memory of water.
I have given up land and weather for you
for deep nighttime where I will always wait
to feel you change direction far away,
and move the sea against my spoiled skin

my love for days I have been
sleeping and half finished

I have been relinquishing the last of the air.
I have been treading water in an asterism of refracted light.
I have been dreaming of your cold-cast steel
 your blue unstoppable body
 the war-game apparatus of your fins.

Instructions

Once you are sure that you have everything in place
snap a new blade out of a safety-razor
and step to the glass. Naked,
you will see just how far there is to go –
don't be daunted. This
is where everything begins.

It should already be clear how this works.
The hand is clean and steady
as it cups the chin and tilts the jaw to the light
dextrously, like a barber.

One/two/three on the left,
and turn again for the right side –
– There! and already now
you are beginning to forget about the air.

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B. 1988 MERSEYSIDE / MADRID / LONDON

*Published in Poetry Review / LRB / Poetry London / Magma /
New Humanist, etc.*

*Salt Book of Younger Poets / Lung Jazz: Young British Poets for
Oxfam / Best British Poetry 2014*

🌀 Eric Gregory Award (2014)

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