

Valentine's Day on the Rocks

by Abbey Burke

Out comes the palm,
the pert, pre-emptive little palm,
the familiar, brisk refusal – *No more for me, thanks.*
The evening, like the house chardonnay
on the turn – like Moon River, on loop,
the floor, awash with happy couples
two-hundred dollars apiece for
three courses of seafood, a long stem rose
in cellophane, a souvenir photograph
for the beautiful people
in their twee little twosomes
already pissed and laughing too loud and
draping themselves over one another under the table –
the slow, slatternly staff – smiling like the
dead-eyed fish,
looming over it all – the Harbour
flat and torpid as a stage drop
Kate was remorseless and
he'd had a gutful.

The waitress
like the other blonde transients
a lost generation of European backpackers –
Iva / Ava / Eva
from Slovakia, Hungary, The Czech –
all swathed in the regulation beige button-up shirt,
continental style with a mandarin collar.
She weaves her way through The Safe Harbour,
the Captain's Rest, The Drunken Sailor,
the multiple stomachs of a great, masticating cow
united in the universal nautical style of
brass anchors, spinnaker's divers' bells
set to artificially-aged wooden beams.
In pride of place, the lobster tank
two-dozen prize specimens

clambering over one another with the
tragic lethargy of those resigned
to a common fate.

From the bowels of the kitchen, the waitress
bears one of the fallen, transformed
by his plunge in the pot to a fiery, liturgical orange
sawn down the middle, laid lengthways
on a vast silver platter, sprinkled ceremoniously with parsley
bound for table forty-nine
where a crumpled, middle-aged dinner suit,
a severe black shift dress
sit angled away from one another,
glowering. He says
you know your husband should really be paying for this