

DANCING WITH SIVA

LESLIE ST. JOHN

Beyond the yellow house I fumble at the stone
steps leading to the sea, try to get the curve
of the balustrade right in my memory.

Surely the water was much closer than this.

When the moon milk-beamed across the terrace,
where I stepped wet from the outdoor shower
and draped myself across the thick railing.

Warm wind salted my body.

All those voices swelled from the house,
as new friends diced onions, papaya,
spoke a Spanish I didn't recognize.

Waves barreled over each other, never reaching my toes.

Moonbathing I asked Venus to lie inside me,
pull my freckled skin, my damp hair into her
opalescent light, homestead in my bones

until I was hers.

Not the fifteen-year-old whose blue bikini
“the size of a washcloth” caused uncles to stumble.

Not the married twenty-something who felt
another man’s cock on her back
in the blue light of a foreign film.

Not the girl inside the woman inside his jeans
posing for him, in a Nicaraguan motel.

But hers—

Light being of desire that heals with touch
my palm to your cheek
is healed with touch
his cheek to my breast.

Naked in a warm pool under winter-bare fig trees,

I slow danced with a man
whose shoulder bore three thick strips
and an empty circle into which I softened.

With the smallest steps, waves whispered
from us until I stepped on his foot.
No surprise a chrysanthemum bloomed between us—

foot to foot, eyes permissioning—
before I could apologize,
he said, “Please, do it again.”

And I felt her lift my arms around him
until I leaned into his Portuguese.

St. John: Dancing with Siva

Still now I hear the song she stirred in him—
My foot misses your foot stepping over,

feel the warm wind of her whisper.