

'Merman'
Jean O'Brien

I had been working in the fish farm for weeks,
that one near the river outlet and the sea.
I didn't like the work we were constantly
wet, dirty, didn't like the men there either.
They were insolent, often dropped small fry
and crushed them underfoot. One in particular
Glaucus, tall, muscular cast his sea-green eyes over me,
tried to lure me as I tipped phosphorus feed
into the holding pens that smoked and stank
and made mist veils I tried to hide within.

One day he walked towards the tanks
waders held in his large hands, he was chewing
on a herb he said was magical, always urging
me to eat it. I would not bite. Anyway whatever way
it was, he leaned to pull the waders on, both legs
got caught in one boot and over he flipped.
I cast around for help, no-one was there. I went back.
He was emerging from amongst the shoals
of salmon, clinging to his single wader
up to his waist were the glittering scales of smolts.

He rose shaking, coloured sequins waterfalling
as he tried to right himself and beckoned me for help.
I took the bait and when I caught him,
we stumbled, he landed me and pinned me down,
I looked, held his eyes, it was early the rising sun
was flooding them with hooks of golden light. I said No.
He parted my thighs and when it was over,
untangled his legs, shook the silver armour
from himself, his eyes had lost their luster.

I left distraught and walked all day stumbling
over ditches and hillocks, stopped now and then
to eat, following the river to its source.
At so many hundred feet I rested where the stream
welled from the earth, cooled my toes, kicked gravel
into little pools and felt the flow snagging
in the waters of my womb. I cried and screamed
and shook my fists at the sky, knew then this birthing
pool was to be my fate, tried to obliterate
his sea-green eyes, his face, his terrible merman tail.