

Meeting the Lobster

by Becky Tipper

Celia has never eaten a lobster. In fact, for thirty years she hasn't eaten any flesh - no mammals, birds, fish or crustaceans.

Graham doesn't see why she can't start with a bacon sandwich. Why she must meet the thing before she eats it. But there's no talking to her, she's set on it. In fact, she knows exactly how it will be.

She will book a table for one at Salvatore's. She will buy a long black dress and have her hair dyed red. While they wash her hair, she will tell the women her chemo starts next week. They will sigh and say you don't expect it to happen to a vegetarian, although just look at Linda McCartney.

At the restaurant, amid the hush-fall of the black tablecloths and the clink of silverware, she will crouch and look into the tank. The water will be powdery green, the light moving slowly through it. She will watch the lobsters roiling and grinding like the rust-encrusted engine of some unfathomed shipwreck.

Among the tangle of segmented legs and incomprehensible whiskers, she will see it. When its black, globed eye turns to her, she will meet its gaze and say yes, that is the one. The man will lift it from the water, its claws waving in slow salute, its legs irritably treading air.

Then she will return to her table, unfold the white linen napkin and smooth it over her lap. She will wait. She will be ready.