

Glow Fly Dance – Jade Gibson

When glowflies emerge, they fly out of the bushes, the leaves, the grass, the trees, the dark earth, spinning in circles through the air, leaving trails of light, a secret calligraphy of letters that appear, then disappear, fading slowly into darkness. They spin their stories through the scent of oranges - the scent of oranges travelled far, she says, drifting like perfume from the orange groves, for miles through the warm night air. The oranges in Mexico were delicious, she says, especially the blood oranges, they were sweet, and red inside, bright, bright red, just like blood, and when you opened them the juice ran out across down your hands and stayed there, sticky.

I am flying. Soon we will land and I am wondering where stories start and where they end.

I see him. I see her. It is hot, it is sunset. It is Mexico. They are making love. He holds her tight, his eyes slanted like the wings of gulls flying in the sky, his skin smooth and dark like olive oil slipping around her limbs.

Hold me tighter, she says.

Forever, he says, the sky red like blood oranges, clouds teased into streaks, the sun smouldering on the horizon of the sea. Waves roll. Outside, glowflies dance, gulls' wings sail through an invisible architecture of spaces shaped by the wind.

Forever, she says, fingers slipping across skin, his fingers swimming through long brown hair. Their skin is salty, salty with sea and the scent of oranges. Against the wall, their shadows dance, cast by the light of a solitary lamp, weave patterns in and out across its surface. Their shadows dance like glowflies, only, shadows are tied to their bodies, whereas glowflies are free to fly anywhere that they please.

Forever, they say, and the glow-flies catch the word, writing it against a darkening sky, passing it between them until, copied so many times, its echoes become meaningless. The red of the sky turns to inky black, reflections of stars dance on pounding waves, the moon comes, slicing through the sky like a silver blade. Silver moon dances on fingertips, cobwebs her hair, glints in the pointed corners of his eyes. On the beach, waves wash away their footsteps, first the toes, then the heels and then even those are gone.

Forever, they say.

The scent of oranges pierces the night, fills it with wet earth.

Forever is never for ever.

Only I am for ever.

A woman flies. She flies over sea, over clouds puffed up, flattened like cotton floss in a blue sky, over mountains, over rivers stretched like veins across land, over fingers of land pointing out to sea. She flies, and underneath, the world turns in its own universe, teeming with life. She flies, thoughts within her, dreams within her, as the Mexican orange groves shake in the breeze, birds sail unfettered in a blue sky.

She lands, steps out into the sound of engines, the smell of oil and fumes in the airport. London is buried in the harshness of winter. She stands on the airport ramp, breathes in air as cold as ice, and shivers, drawing her coat closer around her. She looks around her. Blank buildings stare back, heavy clouds under low sky. Slowly clutching her hand luggage, she walks down the ramp. Without the sun, the sky feels barren. She steps onto tarmac, hard and slippery with ice. Again she shivers, draws her coat closer. As she steps forwards, grey puddles seep around her shoes. She remembers clouds puffed high with sun, her bare feet on warm sand smooth and soft as velvet, the rolling waves, the colours of fish. As she walks forwards, she feels the heat of Mexico gently slip away, until only the soft rocking of waves deep inside her is left. She walks forwards, under a grey flat London sky, and it begins to rain.

I never see my father. But I see with the eyes he gave me. Slanted like the wings of gulls flying in the sky.

Some people are made to be stories and some stories are lived to be told.

She never spoke much about it, says my Granddad. She went travelling round the world, then came back and had you. He was from Puerto Rico. I think.

Your father was Filipino, says my aunt. I am sure of that. His name was William and I remember thinking such an English name for someone Filipino. I saw him for just a brief second in Mexico, exotic, burnt dark from the sun, then he went back down again. They met on a boat travelling between Puerto Rico and Mexico and lived together for a while in Mexico.

You were born in Stepney Hospital in the East End of London, says my Granddad, within the sound of Bow Bells, and that makes you a True Cockney, says my Granddad, and he laughs, and I laugh back.

You were nearly born in the snow, says my mother, the taxi got stuck on the way to the hospital. They wouldn't believe you were coming so fast, not for a first child, they said, but when I arrived they had to rush me in, you were in such a hurry to get out into the world, and you were born almost immediately.

When my mother speaks of Mexico, her eyes mist with the lights of memory.

In the lights of glow-flies there are memories, traces of paths where we have been, and if we don't see them, they fade, invisible, into night air, and if we never record them, how are we to know they ever existed? I began before I was born, travelling through the air like the scent of blood oranges, in my first journey across the world, in the story of my father making love to my mother, the closest I ever got to him, and on my birth certificate there is a dotted line, a straight dotted line where a father's name should be. And if I don't tell the story that follows after, then that too will disappear like the light of glow-flies, and fade away into darkness.

One two three. I am three years old. I am spinning I am turning, and I am dancing on my grandfather's feet. One two three, one two three. Come here, says Granddad, up you get, take your shoes off, stand on my feet, let's dance. He takes my hands in his, one two, one two, but the tops of his brown leather shoes are shiny and my socks are slippery and I slide off, whoops says granddad, holding me tight, okay, take of your socks too, so I do, and now the upper leather of his shoes feel cold and sticky beneath my feet but I don't slip off. He lifts up one foot and mine lifts too, then he lifts up the other and my other lifts too. There you go Mai, he says, now you are dancing.

I can dance, I can dance. We spin around and around over the bright new spiky orange living room carpet - made out of the new plastic stuff you get in the shops now - says Mummy - but it's not at all practical, Granddad being fashionable, he likes to show off.

What do you mean, says Granddad, you have to keep up with the times, you know.

It's still impractical says Mummy, look at it, it's full of holes, people come to your parties and get drunk and drop their cigarette ends and burn holes in your carpet. Granddad's spiky orange carpet is full of holes like the craters on the moon, burnt black on the edges and pale in the middle where the concrete shows through. I like to count them, putting the end of my finger in each of them, one two three, one two three.

You should tell your friends to stop dropping their cigarette ends, says Mummy.

I tell them to use the ashtrays, says Granddad, and I put ashtrays everywhere, but they drink and forget, what do you want me to do, follow them around with an ashtray and catch their ash when it falls?

Then you should have less parties, says Mummy.

Och, says Granddad, I'm a Scotsman, I have to be sociable, if friends come to my door I can't turn them away like the English do.

I don't call them friends, says Mummy, what kind of friends come to your house and burn holes in your carpet, they just come for all the free drinks you give them.

They bring their own drinks too, says Granddad.

Not best Scotch whisky, like you provide, says Mummy.

What do you expect? - says Granddad, I'm not giving them that rubbish stuff, a Scotsman never gives bad Scotch.

What are parties Granddad? I ask.

Parties are where people come and dance to my music, says Granddad.

Can I come? I say, thinking of them dancing round and round in circles.

Not yet, says Granddad, you have to learn to dance first, and you will have to grow up to do that, and that takes a very long time.

One two three, one two three, waltz, says Granddad. One two, one two, foxtrot, says Granddad, and his feet move faster, Jitterbug, he says, as the music plays on Granddad's big wooden music player, it has big tapes that go around and around on top and a record player where Granddad plays his records. Granddad likes to keep his music player polished and shiny - the latest at the company, says Mummy, Granddad likes to show off.

What do you mean, says Granddad, what's wrong with being fashionable, of course it's the height of fashion, I designed it, I'm entitled to have one of my own.

At the front of the player are two cupboards, one with Granddad's records in and the other he keeps locked. That's my drinks cabinet, says Granddad, for my parties, you're not to open it like your two boy cousins did at your Aunt Natasha's when they found a bottle of port and drank it all upstairs while she was having a dinner party downstairs, and they came out on the landing in the middle of the dinner party and rolled down the stairs and collapsed blind drunk right in front of all the guests, and they were all horrified, she said they must have thought their kids were alcoholics.

Aunt Natasha is a textile artist and she is half Russian, and her father came from a very wealthy aristocratic Russian family who fled when there was a revolution in Russia and had to start from scratch again with nothing, and Aunt Natasha's house is the best place in the world because it is full of all kinds of colours and flowers and birds and butterflies which Uncle Gregory calls bric a brac and she has furry Pekinese cats that climb all around the

rooms and when I grow up I want to be like her. We used to see a lot of her and our cousins but we haven't recently because our Uncle Gregory and Aunt Natasha have split up, says Mummy, and she says Uncle Gregory is the black sheep of the family and we don't see any of them anymore.

One two, one two, tango, says Granddad and we sail past the fish in Granddad's fish tank in the corner of the room and around Granddad's new orange plastic covered armchair and his orange plastic sofa, to match his carpet, says Mummy, and back around the music player. Scratch scratch goes the player and Granddad leaps up to take the record off, damages the needle he says, as he puts another record on.

Waltz, says Granddad. Mambo. Jive. How about quickstep? And we sail around and around across the floor.