

**Claudette Bass**

## LOBSTER AND SASHAMI PLAY CHECKERS

I pack this latest suffering down  
putting away what cannot be digested now  
as leftovers for a later meal.

So far I have been eating my way through  
this heartache, bodyache, perpetual loss:  
sashami is an acquired taste: i am not wanted.

Meanwhile you have become a lobster,  
elusive catch, that rare commodity  
I couldn't afford if it were available.

You try to keep us caged, try to control  
the flow of these exotic oceans  
by manipulating temperatures: too hot and too cold.

Rather than endure the emptiness of a set table,  
bare cups and plates waiting, I accepted this  
sad, strained prelude like a feast.

But still we do not touch. We are checker pieces  
edging across the floor to guaranteed safe spaces,  
and now we are paralysed: the next move is a sacrifice.

Thus, we stick to measured definitions,  
reject and exchange what was accidentally captured.  
Neither of us will give an inch in this bloody war.

There is no victory here, no joy.  
This is a stalemate.  
Do we reset the board and start anew?

Or would any rematch end the same,  
in these same tight corners: two damaged players  
afraid of losing and ready to forfeit all?

The day breaks. We run to our own realities.  
We wait for the *other* to capitulate,  
approach stretching like a cat.

I give you away. I take myself back  
shoving me into airless receptacles.  
Soon I will recall more than loving you.

Hunger isn't logical. Need cannot be fulfilled  
ordered from a menu; it does not follow  
the roles of pawn and king.

Sashami is a high-priced catch,  
and trust is as sharp and delicate  
as those knife blades that skilfully slice it.