

BIRTHSTONE

It was the only time in my life I gave in
to extravagance, dallied with metaphor:
Those last days before you shipped out
flickered and flared orange and purple,
Big Bang palette and matching melody.
Our own microcosmic July 4th, you called it.

We looked at black opals mined in a place
called Andamooka in Australia, the lapidary
said. He let us hold chunks of the rough--
like fossil fire. You had him cut a cabochon
for my finger and we watched his grinding wheel
expose green lightning in domed catacombs--
something's secret home under a gold shimmer.

The cutter said opal would be wearer-friendly
to me, October born. Each time you kissed me
I saw those colors crazing my deep dark,
harmonic allegro and velvet largo,
barbs of flame counterpointing nocturnes.

Listen, you said when you put the ring on me,
there's a jazz trumpeter in there playing
the rainbow, riffing his hot pink heart out,
showing you what love looks like. Think of me
every time you sit watching the pretty music.

I'm doing that now, seeing a burst of red:
What you may have seen in the desert under fire.
Staccato and sudden. Cacophony of fire.
Friendly fire. Blundered light.

I hear the trumpet playing Taps. Shivering blue.

FEELINGS, 1993, award winner