

Love, Sonoma Style

We eat fresh crab on the coast in Bodega with just-baked sourdough we tear with our hands. The ocean sings on some days and cries on others. Today the song is lush—the water rushes to the shore like a starving lover and returns to the sea content. This is how I want love: rhythmic like the siren sea. Hungry, like a bank of fog in search of the sun. Vibrant, like the grass on the hillsides that brought us here.

We devour the crab that's soft as velvet and follow with champagne from a winery down the road. I feel giddy. Happy. I move like a dancer in front of the sea. My lover hurries to my side and lifts me like a ballerina on the edge of the sky.

Seagulls patrol in search of abandoned bags of chips. A couple runs into the ocean and, in seconds, the birds swoop in and steal their treats. My lover and I laugh until an overhead bird splats droppings into my open purse. One blanket over, a man and woman cover their mouths to hold in their amusement, which of course, at first, I fail to see.

Convertible top lowered, we cruise through the fog that's damp on our cheeks. We blast straight into sunshine as we leave the beach behind. Heading inland, we pass the tall, white schoolhouse where Hitchcock filmed *The Birds*. On a gently sloping hill, the building sits alone on Bodega Lane. I think back to the bold seagulls we encountered at the beach. What if they became angry one day?

My scarf lifts in the breeze as we speed toward Petaluma. My lover wants to buy me a gift on Kentucky Street. Shop after shop—from trinkets to clothing. Like we've been in love forever, we walk hand in hand down the street. He buys me a bracelet, adding charms made by local artisans. A seagull with obsidian eyes. A silver heart. A bunch of grapes.

We head north in search of peach-colored poppies and mustard in bloom. Veering off Highway 101, we drive through a tunnel of trees then burst into sunlight where wildflowers are bouquets of purple, orange, and pink. Patsy Cline sings "Crazy" on the radio, and my lover stops the car on a deserted lane. He climbs out and comes for me. Car running, doors open, he pulls me into his arms, and we slow dance to Patsy in the middle of the road. I'm seduced by the sunlight as it filters through the leaves. A bird from a distant branch calls out to me.

Back in the convertible, we head to the vineyards. A field of mustard flowers weave a fabric of brilliant yellows, oranges, and golds. Leaving the car on the side of the road, we run into the blossoms and spin like feathers caught in a storm-soaked breeze. Our laughter surrounds us as we fall to the ground. We're high on fresh air. We're dizzy in love.

"Did you see those daffodils on the exit ramp?" I ask.

"It's magic. Like you." He takes me in his arms. The heat of the sun caresses me.

"I love you," he whispers.

“I love you too.”

He is the mountains, and I am the sea. We tangle together with kisses and moans. In a bed of bright mustard, he loves me. Under the sapphire sky, he loves me. With honey bees somersaulting above, he loves me.

Minutes? Hours? We're lost in time. I float on his kisses and breathe his love deep. A hawk climbs the sun as I cry out my lover's name. Should we stay until nightfall? Wear stars in our hair?

Ah . . . romance is sweet.

He taps me and pulls me out of my trance.

“Let's go eat,” he says.

I button my blouse. He zips up his pants.

Together, we stand.

I expect to see butterflies flutter and soar. I expect to see mustard plants bend in the breeze. I expect to reach for the sky in an afterglow haze.

Instead.

A field full of workers. They're looking at me. Two of the men block the sun with hands to their brows like saluting soldiers.

The flush on my face reddens and burns. God, no doubt they heard me in ecstasy.

“*Buenos dias!*” my lover calls out with a laugh.

“*Adios,*” I stammer and race to the car.

My lover is close behind.

“Dinner in Healdsburg?” He opens my door. I slide into the seat with a giggle.

The sun is a lion chasing the sea. Tangerine and coral splash the sky. A huddle of clouds brings the night as a gift. We cruise into Healdsburg and park in the plaza. A crescent moon hangs low in the sky. A short stroll and we duck into a restaurant—candlelight, crystal flutes, whispers, and kisses.

Convertible top up, we head for our cottage and fall into bed complete.

This is a slice.

Love in Sonoma.

Tomorrow?

Who knows what we'll see.