

emily & elspeth

poems

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emily

before leaving the west coast

slipping away from herself emily watches her body get up
salutes the sun someone spies on her
has rented the suite across the street

emily picks up the coffee pot
pours summerspill
through the window
someone has turned on the sun
frigate birds hitchhike

on BC ferries

the mountain in prayer swallows the sky

rose petals dust the heath

pigeons
like wings speed to the finish
writers are caught
in her mind

this is my home emily
thinks takes little bird notes her hurried hand

cats wave "oo la la" as she passes by she sings to bones
"fa la la la la la la la"
eats what falls out of the sky

when closing her eyes
tears fall ever since her car accident

she cuts the tears in half puts them in a jar

there is always a staying before a leaving

mechanical tin cans

emily watches ten channels simultaneously
turnips in her ears she's blown

her reptilian circuits her head moves her

"there is an app i've got and an actual
person answers and tells you what the weather is"

emily stares into a vast emptiness
a little lost she can not breathe she is nowhere

locating herself cars high-tail

pyrotechnics
at English Bay
blow herons from their nests
emily cannot hear her self-

hypnosis tape jabs in another shellac-laden sweetie
downs tea with maltitol sorbitol
anything at all at all

feels like a feedlot everyone
tailgating

the herd trapped in their mechanical tin cans

chewing the ferrous taste of blood on emily's tongue

in the middle

emily's tires smack the pavement
she pulls off Highway 101
heading west in her wet purple Honda
she knows the etiquette

of the highway drives in the middle of the lane squawks

at anything at all off centre glances rearview for
the man with the cam panning

terrified of cars flying around her she's been hit
more times than she can count

her car lifts off as her right front tire hits roadkill *shit*
probably a cat they'd be better off at home declawed
fur and feathers under tired tires birds pigeons squirrels
how many has she buried this year?

the driver in front of her put on the drag emily honks

she loves her horn car ahead screeches to a halt
churlish yellowbeard climbs out
marches towards her bellowing shaking fist

emily rolls up her window puts her car in reverse taps
the vehicle behind her

blackbeard climbs out as she drives away

shaking

Elspeth

Vancouver to San Miguel

Equipoise. Treetops spin, spit vowels under the double-faced moon. Elspeth stays where her hands are, on the wheel, barreling down Highway One, singing a song to Canada. “Oh Canada -ah -ah” as she zips through White Rock, by the sign *Welcome to the USA*, past border guards with quick-scented shepherds, and into the Land of Freedom. State law requires a Canadian domicile. Past tulips in Tulalip, Saginaw, Chuck-a-nut Drive, the Korean War Memorial in Oregon, where rolls the Columbian river.

A hand in Grand Canyon, Elspeth steals chunks of white quartz she sees while peeing. Past Kanab, the greatest show on earth, the sun arches across the sky. Hoodoos, thin pillars of limestone, spires bulbous stepping through time recount five hundred and twenty-five million years of history. On the radio, “there are more refugees in Lebanon than any other country in the world.” Past coral clouds, chocolate cliffs, bristle cone, trees, Umpqua Park, Calapooya Creek.

She talks to her niece Bessie that night from Ruby’s Inn. “Hi Aunt Lizzy, my phone fell into the outhouse.” She fished it out, five feet down into the feculence. Says she got it out, but it still stinks when she talks on it.

Elspeth is still trying to convince herself reality is perfect. Author of her suffering, she remembers when she sold frogs for fifty cents, tadpoles a penny. Grey shapes, Mesozoic shape shifters, are held captive by the horizon. That night, peering out on her frost-laden balcony, she thinks how nicely a drink would go down below the belt of Orion.

Her mouthguard pinches the skin in her cheeks, she gnaws the excess skin as she climbs out from beneath the four hundred thread count sheets. She trips down the corridor to the washroom, pulls her shoulders back, points her shoulder blades together like angel wings. These years of writing take a toll on her. The trip from Vancouver to San Miguel is doing her in.

In this Fabulous Turquoise House

Elspeth rented in San Miguel, she finally has a desk as long as Nicole Brossard's. There's plenty of room for her resources and friends' books. Sun rays pierce a couple of rafters overhead.

Thoughts, like tiny arrows, fly through her head more quickly than her wee fingers can move on the keyboard, where she cobbles out a ten-finger prelude. She thinks of the cantina down the street, opening right about now. In the old days, she could blast down there for one quick shot of tequila, chat up the ex-pats. She says to herself as her Aunt Flo the poet would say, riffing on an e.e. cummings "How shall we fill this most amazing day?" She reaches over to her night table, glances at her blackberry: gym, writing, lunch with Marion.

The guttural "readle-eek" of a grackle, like the opening of a rusty gate, reminds her of where she is. She is volunteering to teach creative writing at Casa Hogar Santa Julia Don Bosco, the girls' orphanage. A truck with a loudspeaker on its roof bumps over brick street stones. "Naranjas!" "Fresas!" on sale at seven a.m. Another fellow with a Santa-sized sack of canned beer on his burro's back shouts "Abarrotes!" She feels the edges of her mouth turn up. Lizard, as her brother would call her, likes this place. Her mother disapproved of her brother calling her Lizzy Lizard, Elspeth liked the nickname Lizzy. *Way hay and up she rises, early in the morning*, she sings.

As she tattoos her eyebrows on in the bathroom mirror, her once feral kitty vies for her attention, David Gray's "As I'm Leaving" plays in the background. She begins to cry. Pharrell's "Happy" dances through her veins. In this moment, listening to this music, everything is coming together and overwhelming her with how wonderful life can be. A single, simple moment.

Settling Into Mexico

A plane overhead. A street dog barks. Lizzy looks down from her clouds. A big rig is winding down the brown hills into the village. The neighbour screams in English “I’m tired of living on top of each other.”

Lizzy dreamed of a writer in Vancouver’s Chinatown last night. Janit Dawn. Janit introduced her to a bunch of her gay friends and took her to a farm where there were fresh grain-fed chickens and little pigs. The farmer handed her a pig delicately and she says she does the same for the chickens that are having a pleasant gabble there.

She lathers her legs and arms with mosquito spray to beat the night bites and enjoys the sting. She keeps spraying the spot where she has a little cut to feel that titch of pain, again and again. The cat’s tongue trills. How can a person twitter the day away in the name of writing and find that she has not written, nor done anything else of value? What does she do with those minutes, hours? She slaps together lunch and crawls into the closet for the afternoon. At Happy Hour though, she gobbles up the sunset. Her mouth is larger than when her mouth guard is in it. With each bite, the sunset grows deeper, darker, more delicious. She is thinking of trying cashews on her spaghetti tonight, the ones Jane Siberry gave her which she found in her pocket.

Lizzy has an obsession with having everything in its right place. As a girl, she knew when her sister had been in her room, looking at her things. She knew how she placed each item on her dresser, the direction each pointed in and if anything had been moved. Even her nails are cut perfectly straight.