

Odes &
Laments

poems

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Chopsticks

Grandfather sets down the bowl full of marbles.
I pick up the chopsticks and hover,
then picture my hand as a heron
with a long, long beak plunging down
to pluck each orb, lift it
through air and held breath
in a tremulous trip toward the saucer.

Five thousand years of evolution in hand:
branches honed to stir ancient cauldrons
become sleek batons of ivory, gold or jade
adorning an aristocrat's table.
With their deft dance and dip,
more adroit than a fork.
Twin acrobats poised
to hoist choice morsels.

Let your elders lead, he tells me.
Never point your chopsticks at a guest.
Never spear your food like a fisherman.
Don't tap the side of your bowl like a beggar.
Keep them by the plate when you rest
or across the bowl at meal's end. But never
upright like incense burning
in an urn for the dead.

While he watches, stiff bamboo
grows nimble. One by one,
each small glassy planet arcs up
then lands with a *clink!*
The bowl gleams, empty.
Grandfather nods.

Piano

Weekend mornings, I was a Lazy Mary who never got up, despite how many fortissimo rounds of “Frère Jacques” my mother played. Schumann’s happy farmers pranced next to marching saints, amazed with grace.

Some nights, she rolled out barrels through wild Irish roses, Chopin waltzing into Beethoven’s moonlight, the piano bench her throne over kingdoms of sound. Pulse, leap, plunge of chord. Shiver and trickle of trill. Stinging pinpricks of staccato. Stalking octaves. Arpeggios cascading along the keyboard, conjured like rainbow scarves drawn from a magician’s hat. All her spells honed, notes imprinting the air above the raised lid.

Vivace, allegro.

Grave, doloroso.

Moderato rarely.

Pianissimo never.

Z

Tiny zigzag on the snow
of the page, you add sizzle
and fizz, a spritz
of pizzazz to words
you visit. Electric
eccentric, you buzz
through fuzz
daze
doze
snooze.
Plurals, possessives zip with your zest.
You never fizzle. Even at zero,
you're everyone's thunderbolt!

Crow

“Canuck the Crow Voted Metro Vancouver’s Unofficial Ambassador”
—CBC News

Dark star of the show,
prankster, terror, tease, bad boy,
you ride the Skytrain for free, dive-bomb letter carriers,
target cyclists’ backpacks between rest stops at McDonald’s.
Gas caps, cigarette packs, lighters—what’s ours is yours,
at least for ten seconds (if it’s shiny).
Peck on Playland cash registers like a pro,
snatch tickets at the racecourse,
plunk keys stolen months before
on a horse trainer’s head. The greatest flap?
Upstage the flaming car, armed suspect, cops with guns.
Swoop down, steal the evidence, steal the scene.
Cameras rolling, give chase, knife in beak. Then soar
into notoriety—CBC, ABC, *The Guardian*,
The Washington Post, YouTube eternal, Facebook
and 116,800 followers. Your own hit movie.
No lone crow, you adopted a human pal
whose caress you’ll bear, whose arm you ride with pride.
Plus nightly hangouts with a cawing choir of six thousand
at the Still Creek rookery. Then you settled down.
A wife, a nest, two kids to feed. And now to mourn
in the cycle of effort and chance. For centuries
your kind observed our foibles, became our fables.
Subject of poetic tomes. Battlefield death eater.
Hitchcock classic. Apollo’s pure white messenger
burnt black for uttering truth. But you transcend
omen, symbol, metaphor. The world’s your game.
Sleekly assured, you size us up with a darting glance.
A few hops, then off
to join those black streams ribboning the sky,
wings like satin fans against the dusk.

Sea Star

“... the stars were blinking out.”

—Ed Yong, “A Starfish-Killing Disease Is Remaking the Oceans,” *The Atlantic*

A fleck of constellation stranded
in a blank expanse of shoreline.

No fragments of mollusk,
no green tendrils. No trace

of your undersea universe
beyond the ocean’s undulating

border. I hover, ponder
your upturned arrival. Do I imagine

your flinch as I wake you from stasis?
You freeze, rigid.

I gingerly lift and balance
your body between twigs,

reach water’s edge, flip you
right side up.

A blurred wriggle—descent
in a blink. Shallow waves wash over

impassive sand. Galaxies
of your sunflower kin dissolve

on reefs from Alaska to Mexico.
Go where the tide takes you, sea star.

What will be left?

Consumery

gluten free

wheat free

sugar free

wrapped in plastic

salt free wrapped in plastic

dairy free wrapped in plastic

MSG free wrapped in plastic

peanut free wrapped in plastic

fat free wrapped in plastic

sulfate free wrapped in plastic

cholesterol free wrapped in plastic

lactose free wrapped in plastic

cage free wrapped in plastic

free range wrapped in plastic

no artificial colours no artificial flavours

no preservatives no animal by-products

no high fructose corn syrup or hormones

no antibiotics just wholesome

whole grain stone ground grass fed

fair trade organic all natural

freedom wrapped in plastic

Lemon

After *Points of Lemon*, a woodblock print by
Masato Arikushi of the painting by Mary Pratt

The lemon surrenders itself,
wedges of light ignited
by late afternoon sun, burnishing
the silver boat of its saucer that floats
atop the table's inky glimmer.
Translucent layers of shadow
fall like spires, ghost
leaves from a forgotten grove.
At the centre, incandescence.