

TOUR OF A SALMONBERRY

A salmonberry is a
luminous spiral,
a golden basket,
woven of sunshine,
water, and birdsong.

I'm told that the birds
sing so sweet because
of all the berries they eat
and that is how you
can have a sweet voice too.

In my Native language,
the word for salmonberry
is 'Alile.' In Sanskrit, *Lila* means
'God plays.' Salmonberries
sometimes look that way.

Every year, they debut,
spectacular in the landscape,
worthy of their genus name:
Rubus Spectabilis, meaning,
red sight worth seeing.

Each drupelet holds a seed
and the shimmering secret
kept by rain, of how to rise,
float above the earth, feel
the sun, and return.

THE PERILS OF FLIGHT

The scenario is this: A bird is stuck in the house,
much like you have seen many times as a child.
Your hands keep reaching for the flutter of wings
and withdrawing as the bird protests. You know
if it cannot be retrieved, the bird will die.

THE FROLICSOME CRESTS AND GLISTENING

“What is it then between us?” –Walt Whitman

There are 20 million pounds of gold
suspended in normal seawater,
spread out in parts-per-trillion.

Gold is good conductor
of electricity, but seeing how it's sought,
I'll bet it's the best conductor of a heart's deepest want.

I once had a conversation with my daughter
in which she asked,

“Do you believe everything is connected?”
“That depends,” I said.
“On what?” she asked.
“On whether you're being spiritual or conspiratorial.”
“Spiritual,” she said.
“Then, yes,” I said, “everything is connected.”
“How can everything be connected spiritually,
but not conspiratorially?” she asked.

Considering it, I believe the spirit conspires
against our errant belief that we are separate.

I might be you. You might be me. We might be
the living sea with 20 million pounds of gold
shimmering, suspended between us,

conducting our hearts' deepest wants across
frolicsome crests and glistening, and what else
could it be, if not a spiritual conspiracy?

DAFFODILS

After Wordsworth

The Indigenous poet
writes life-affirming poems
about daffodils.
Her audience says,
“But you’re oppressed.”

The Indigenous poet
writes poems of outrage
about oppression.
Nobody cares.
She gets depressed.

The Indigenous poet
gets requests for poems
about being Indigenous.
“But, all my poems are
about being Indigenous.”

The Indigenous poet
isn’t considered
an Indigenous poet,
because, “Shouldn’t you
write about genocide?”

The Indigenous poet
tries to write poems
about genocide.
Her poet spirit dies.
(Genocide gets the job done.)

The indigenous poet says,
(Stang tse temxwila!”*
and writes about daffodils,
and the untouchable beauty
of living a poet’s life.

*”What the hail” this is as close as we get to a swear word in
Xwlemi Chosen (Lummi Language)

TOWARD A BEAUTIFUL FLARE OF RUIN

Is safety crippling? Better to be a fierce,
and hungry, and angry thing of tastes,
and moods, and tempers; to devour?

Too long for achingly? To walk in between?
To hide from oneself? To hide from others?
To indulge and set free, and destroy?

To wish harm on and take it back?
To wish not to wish harm on. To howl
and wander, shameless of the appetites

and the failure to desire to curb them.
To follow the cravings illicitly. To follow,
knowing where they lead.

Or, to turn the desires away and open
the heart to fall prey to hunger, and lack,
and jealousy and shame, and meanness?

To lose touch with the fluidity of the spirit?
To find new desires and cultivate tastes for
the sunrise? To trade the sweetness of

transient pleasures for the steady sweetness
of your own voice. To be destroyed,
and rebuilt by songs.

VINEGAR

It's midnight.
The neighbors are fighting again.
There is the sound of something precious
breaking.

A door slams,
then weeping.

A memory of good days
caught in the jam, smarts,
bleeds room temperature tears,
throbs blue, goes numb.

The huckleberry door,
the color of a bruise,
is the loneliest sight.
He escapes through it,

finds no way but back to her,
to shared solitude;
the forgiving arms of need.
His hand curls

into a pleading fist.
He swallows vinegar and knocks.
It's midnight.
The neighbors are fighting again.

There is the sound
of something precious breaking.
A door slams,
then weeping.

LIVE NUDE GIRL'S FAVORITE THING TO FEEL

All night, men reach up
to touch her ankles.
Mornings, on her stoop
she smokes, while
the neighbor kid asks
about all her favorite things.

“What's your favorite
thing to feel?” he asks,
holding up his softest
blanket, giving it a rub
between his finger
and his thumb.

She wants to tell him
her favorite thing
to feel is love,
but keeps coming back
to the secret she
discovered a week ago.

Waking in the night,
her left arm, dead asleep,
was a limb of luscious flesh,
foreign and remote. She used
her working hand to lift it
and rest it on her chest.

The sensational feeling
Of her own sensationless skin
surprised her. Startled,
she thought of Narcissus,
swallowed up, drowned
in his own sweetness. Lost.

So soft, so soft. She never knew,
never understood all those
desperate reaching hands.

THE HOBO AND HIS PIGEONS

The sound-the-sound of longing in the streets,
Ti-tum-ti-tum-ti-tum-ti-tum-ti-tum.
My chum's a bum for rum who lives in slums.
He craves the meat of beasts with beets and leeks,
and sings his longing to the burdened beaks
of birds who sing, "I want, I want, ti-tum."
Those burdened beaks, they long and sing for crumb
from bum with rum and roses in his cheeks.

And when he speaks he coos them out a jest
of bars and men and broads and roads he's known
to give them ease of heavy, hungry loads
and fill their beaks with sweetened emptiness,
while he forgets the bleary, blurry cold
in songs of longing and remembrances.

QUIET CHILDREN

I notice how bees keep flying
to the emptiness in the tree
where their home used to be.
They don't disturb the children
playing in my driveway, oblivious
to the hovering above their ears.

I watch them from my steps
and listen to the green collision
of a million leaves, unsettled by a breeze.
A car staggers by, dragging along
a swarm of summer dust.
The children have all gone quiet.

They are in a circle, wiggling
and whispering about something
on the ground. I investigate, and see
a wrecked hive, the color of winter.
The older boys, in their cruelty
were at it last night with stones.

I shoo the children away, tell them,
"Go play." The doomed larvae strive.
and vibrate. I cringe, but can't help
looking and looking, even days later,
at those starving conic bodies,
shimmering in their pale hexagon cells.