

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 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 a 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 the closest we get to a swear word in Xwlemi Chosen (Lummi Language).

TIME CAPSULE

Today I want to send you sweet poems
and songs and movies with puppies
and dancing all day long. But the truth
is so much more entertaining and funny,
and tragic. Put your thumb on the left dot
and your index finger on the right dot below:



Now, keeping your hand in this position,
put it out in front of you and look at it.
You are only allowed to like me this much.

Yesterday, I sent you poems about violence
and murder and we talked about the apocalypse.
I likely did it to frighten you. This was possibly
because you had expressed something
that I interpreted as you liking me this much:



That's too much.
It's okay. You didn't know;
haven't seen what happens when
these things get out of control.
I have been at war enough
to be startled by my own amazing ruthlessness,
and I like your gentle face:



Maybe I misunderstood, and you are just
a really, really nice guy who loves to say
sweet things that make a girl feel good.
Either way, you frighten me.

ELEVATOR

We're late. Waiting for the elevator
I grumble at daughter, "Don't worry about me.
Keep focused on getting ready, yourself!"
The doors open and the neighbors hear my scold.
To dispel the awkward moment, the guy neighbor
holds up a cake. "I have cake," he says, "If we
get stuck in here, we won't go hungry."

"We won't have to eat each other," I say.
"Well, not right away," he responds. I smile.
The gal neighbor looks uncomfortable.
Looking around at her fellow passengers,
I think she knows she'd be the first to go.

"What's the cake for?" I ask.
"We're going to a Passover dinner."

In the car, daughter says, "Wow, Mom,
that got dark quick. Our poor neighbors
were on their way to a nice dinner, and have now
been confronted with the fact that their neighbor
would cannibalize them in an elevator."
"Not right away," I said, "He had Passover cake."
Besides, I'm sure they know about Catholics,
how we've been eating Jesus Christ
for the last 2000 years.

THE ANCESTORS

"Physicists Find Way To 'See' Extra Dimensions"

-sciencedaily.com, February 4, 2007

There were 10 dimensions.
In ours, we opened an envelope
and the message inside changed.
In his dimension it stayed the same.

He came back. They all did.
No. They never left. We're all here—
have always been here.
In-fact, we've run out of room.

We stack up on each other
like letters in a mailman's satchel,
or a frame of film threaded on a spool.
We don't know it while we're here.

The whole story is already writ.
Meanwhile, a little backlit machine
is over there talking to itself. It says
"There used to be 10 dimensions.

Now there are only 7... Oh, excuse me.
There are 23, plus-one every second."
In this one, I am an ancestor.
In the next, a descendant.

RENA PRIEST

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