Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Kelly Gray: Two Poems

Kelly Gray · Wednesday, March 3rd, 2021

The Hush of a Switchblade

Let me write quite for you,
two sentence stanzas as if we have time left in this world for measured sentiment.

I hesitate, even, to bring your knife to this poem,
though I carry it carefully as Last Language sung cliff side, sharp words pointed away from you.

I cut an X into the flesh that separates me from your breastbone,
wanting to know the delicate meat of your ribs,

Do you see me fleeting as ghost, you as child scuffed, us on bike and vine?
I carve, to whisper to your wound,

Delivering to your heart small wooshes of anatomy laid bare by maps drawn anew:
you are universe whole, all stars and ligament,

Those lips fields of dirt that I drag my knees across,
the space of your mouth an ocean of squid and whale,

Your knuckle scarred hands weather,
myth and death in the slung mud of your down pour,

Me, with too many eyes and a sword for a tongue,
each of us kneeling for no one, we were only children,

undoing prayers like behemoths feasting on gods,
our bellies full, the quiet of the poem devoured.

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Augury

The raven Tiresias is telling secrets at the bar, six drinks in and two snake strikes behind them, they lost their gender in the bathroom, their eyesight in the alleyway.

But I am walking creaky legged trying to get home when they fly up next to me, and they lean in

bend in, can’t quite tell if this is man or bird but they have this way of opening their mouth so wide, asking me to count the feathers that travel down their open beak to the back of where their bra is showing.

I have to look in to see for myself, tongue black wet, back of throat black, glassy green eyes made of milk.

This bird sees birds, throws sparrow wings to the sky and cries out this is truth, this is death, I am blind!

I’m just trying to get laid but you’re talking to me like you know me, bird.

The raven puts its cigarette out in the entrails of a smashed starling found behind the wheel of a Cadillac.

Their eyes roll back into their head and the smell of burned wings makes me lick lip hungry, they start to tell me a story that I already know but forgot ten years back at another bar.

I interrupt them, so lush with rice whiskey and steeped cherries that golden poppies spill from my lips, so full of blossoms they can smell my unfolding within the containment of a body without wings.

I just want to know, my own pleasure, where did it go?
The bird pulls back to look at my face, petals falling from my eyes.

Yes, Teiresias, I remember (now) how we met. You flew into the shutters, almost dead on the floor among the suitcases and cassette tapes. I took your body in my hands, tied my words to your feet, marked your beak with my blood.

I released you through the window in hopes you would fly my letters home across oceans and rooftops, scattering blood from my wrists so that no one family would feel the weight of my burden.

Now you’ve come back, to tell me what you know of me. To right my two wronged way, to caw up my skirt and untie me from this gold rotted city where I’ve been held flat against the hills, almost dead on the floor.

Now it’s your turn. Unbind my eyes from the ground, release me from the relentless growl of a thousand sleeping babies, all their mothers pushing against doors to keep the sound of the sky from descending lest they begin to wake, starved.

We can fly these streets together, opening all the doors, rattling bassinets, grabbing pigeon after pigeon to toss their bodies to the streetlights like a map of bird light leading us past slayed snakes and the intersection of Geary and 20th where I held him when he died.

Tempt me out of this body
holy untold
bound for joy
promise me it’s here in the prophecy.

Promise me, Tiresias, you’ll take me home tonight, to show me what I cannot see.

They hop, bird like, human like, foot to foot, wrapping a black wing around me,
nest bound.

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