Do You See Me Waving?

42.

You announce it, as if it were the answer for everything. You're playing a game with the fiddler crabs, wiggling your toes, counting the seconds until they reemerge. It's dangerous, I wouldn't come out for anything. But they need to eat, you answer, sifting the mud. And they mate every two weeks. The males wave their big fiddler claws to attract females who follow them into their holes. Purblind love, I say. Only if you're still as a predator, only if you're invisible, will they come out. But it's impossible to tell the difference between love and danger of a silent predator. They're quick enough, you answer, to make up for that. They have to risk it. You call it trust. An adolescent ibis works its long curved beak into one of the holes without success. I call this hope. But the adult birds know how pointless it is and don't even try. It's what lovers do, tunnel into safety, hold on until the ibises stop digging. Because love is as dangerous as a predator. We keep counting but it waits us out.

The Simplest Gifts

We love by accepting, I say, unconditionally: the simplest gifts, the dumbest promises. You nod in agreement but remind me, the male osprey knows that if she doesn't approve, his mate will discard the branch he offers. Sometimes the things I want to give to you, the words I want to say, scare me like that. Above us a large nest sits on a platform atop a power pole. A male osprey flies out of it, low through the mangrove limbs beside us, his wings like knives in the leaves. I offer you a shell I've picked from the beach. Washed of its color, its original shape nearly indiscernible, you tumble it in your fingers. In full flight the osprey grasps and breaks a twig from a tree. Crack! Inured to her will, the sound emboldens him. He turns back to his nest. Though small the branch is accepted. It's just an ordinary shell. After a quick inspection you toss it into the water. But it's all I want from you, something small and plain as that twig.

The Cello

If love were easy I would play as beautifully with any bow, an equation could be solved with any number. It's why I hate the soft hollow of her knee, her arms' mathematical arcing as they pull these pellucid notes from my heart. The way she bows me until the sound I can't help but make when she presses her fingers just there, and there, resonates. A quantum vibrato that fills and rattles the empty space between my molecules. Love is desperate, I protest, but relinquish it on the pitch she commands because I'm made for her straddled plucking and the horsetail she flails incautiously across my taut ribs. Each note she breaks open -breaks open my wooden heart and sublimes into the electric air. Not my will nor hers but a reckless current when we touch. The composition is timeless, she turns the pages of the score with painted fingers. It's not the way she plays the music I love. but the music we make of our entanglement.

The Bow

When she touches the bow's rosewood inlay, its ivory frog, when she lifts the length of pernambuco wood, it seems a kind of ménage à trois. The shock of horsetail is a fourth, like a stranger met on a train. Later, an invitation to dinner. an unexpected tryst. The cellist feels their joy. She carries in her instrument. selects a bow and plays a note, a chord. She chooses another, plays a note, a chord. No prices are listed. It makes no difference because price is not the measure. She picks a third, plays, sets it aside. The Cuban Ipe wood shines, the carbon composite balances, less than weightless in her hand, but she knows it's not up to her. The bow will choose the instrument. The morning progresses like a slow dance. The bow maker makes tea for her as if they were merely chaperones at a schoolgirl's cotillion. They sit, talk of music, wait for the music to begin.

Under The Horse Chestnut Tree (Page 1)

I can't say if I unlaced my shoes or he untied the knots and unrolled the socks to bare my feet but I felt more naked than shoeless from that deliberate uncovering. Was it the summer wind that lifted my dress above my knees or his hands that peeled the cotton cloth away, his lips that limned the contours of my mouth and licked the beads of sweat away, on a summer afternoon, sitting in the front yard under the horse chestnut tree? The neighbors watched from their porches as we kissed in the wind that lifted my dress above my knees. The fine hairs on my thighs stood upright in the breeze, his fingertips felt like cat's-eye marbles, must have felt their stiffening when they rolled into the labyrinth hidden under there. Was it the wind that shook those quivering limbs and bent my body so exquisitely? Oh, I was breathless as those limbs palpitating in the wind that blew my dress above my knees.

Under The Horse Chestnut Tree (Page 2)

There is no longing like the longing of the wind, I heard only wind in the horse chestnut tree, and chestnuts chafing on their branches. The white panicles of erect spring flowers now become these thorny nuts in summer. How they will fall to earth in autumn, cracking open to open their chaste centers. I will not resist him nor how he will thumb them slowly to throbbing luminescence, nor how he will rub them to polished perfection. How can a fallen object be so flawless? I wondered, as the wind lifted my dress above my knees. Horse chestnuts are bitter, not for eating, but rolling endlessly by boys between their fingers until they shine like cat's-eye marbles under the horse chestnut tree.