

Love Poems for Sixfold October 24, 2014

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.

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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.

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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.

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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.