

**EVEN MY MUSE WHISPERS: WHY POETRY?  
AS ALWAYS, THE ANSWER IS FOUND WITH THE POEMS**

*If your nerve deny you—go above your nerve. Emily Dickinson*

In the beginning, I believed that Janis Ian was my muse  
and later added Leonard Cohen, who fits the bill as well.  
But I knew then, as I do now, my ephemeral flibbertigibbet  
can just as easily be found elsewhere.

The thing is, my muse feeds my poems and I need to try and  
remember that because, when I feel blocked, I'm not  
paying attention to my muse.

My poems are an accident you just cannot drive by,  
the heart-stopping phone call that shatters the night, and,  
the herd that comes to grieve with no invitation nor notice.  
My poems are death and ashes, and the colour of smoke,  
the promise curled inside a baby's fist released.

*Poetry is an echo, asking a shadow to dance. Carl Sandburg*

My muse lurks in a stand of old-growth paper-white birch trees.  
I've found her stuffed in worn-out comfortable slippers  
and in slinky red-leather stilettos sporting bows tied  
at the ankles; she likes to dance, she does.

My poems are candles of hope in windows dark and hurricane  
lanterns at the end of a dock.

They are rain coursing thick, forked lightning, faded love  
letters, thousands of migrating monarchs on the wing;  
an off-white, finger-nail-slim crescent moon;  
oil-on water rainbows, cerulean dragons,  
Schrödinger's cat, and, ancient stained-glass windows.

*Poetry is a way of taking life by the throat. Robert Frost*

My muse regularly races a Lamborghini on the Autobahn, enjoys  
music played at ear-splitting decibels; cellos weeping, pianos that talk;  
and bluesy, bruised voices as well.

My poems are fireworks rending the sky. They are oils on canvas,  
unexpected graffiti; words written in stone and in sand at low tide;  
calligraphically magnificent works, and scribbles enigmatically  
illegible. They come from the Terrace of Infinity, high above  
Ravello, Italy; a place where poets go to die; I go there in dreams  
and in life and in poetry, maybe even sometimes, in death.

My muse often arrives from viewing ancient wonders of the world  
but she also likes to linger near unborn children, flag-draped  
coffins, enigmas, and wolves—alone, and in packs.

Spurred on by passionate indignation, she too flits around  
test-tubes filled with grief; asylums, and lunatics.

***Poetry heals the wounds inflicted by reason. Novalis***

My poems are sobs heard in the silence that is the dark, deepest before dawn.

They are the sound of a toddler's giggles, and the result of too many tears being wept over too much.

They are carnelian flames a-blaze in the fireplace, a protest march, a lullaby, an Avé being sung by my daughter, witnessing sun-birth, a Tuscan vista from a castle window.

My muse is reflected in most of what I write, and she helps me revisit her ethos and the heart of what she offers to remind me of what it is that sparks me alive. Not infrequently, she helps me to write from a place of regret, or intolerance, or rage at indifference, or injustice. She encourages me to remember., I am writing to try and stay sane in an insane world.

***Poetry is nearer to vital truth than history. Plato***

To that end, she leads me to gentler places where my grandchildren live, where there are horses, harps, hideaways, and the love of my life who both permeates my existence and frames it.

My muse can be a fierce warrior or the kindest most sympathetic ear I know. I have recently realized she is a shapeshifter, ready to become whatever I need; at last, I am grasping how lucky I am to have her.

***I write only because there is a voice within me that will not be still. Sylvia Plath***

**OWNING A WOLF**

*Sometimes I need only to stand where I am to be blessed. Mary Oliver*

Don't go too far beyond me;  
my old legs tremble to keep up  
and the blizzard thickens more  
each moment blotting out your  
sooty coat.

I see you glance behind,  
your amber eyes glow even now,  
through the whiteout.

As if you sense my weariness,  
you sit, lift your lupine snout  
high into the storm, and wait.

Of all your versions,  
I love this one the best; your  
canine soul concealed complete.  
The real you, ears pricked up,  
your fur fluffed full and bristling,  
and, you appear about to howl.  
I wonder with which of your  
timbres you'll enchant me tonight;  
probably the one-note yowl,  
that shivers down my back,  
makes me feel alone, reminds, you  
belong not to me, not to anyone.

Just before I stumble to your side,  
you give your mighty head a toss,  
and there's a flash of scarlet at  
your neck, then in a swirl of powder,  
you barge on through unbroken snow,  
leaving me to stand alone, and watch  
you go.

The red's the tag the vet put on your  
collar earlier, affirming all vaccines  
are up-to-date.

You were not happy getting that;  
your eyes told mine, but still you  
you behaved gentle as a dog.  
The vet, compassionate as ever  
asked, as he must, how often  
you had run away since our last  
appointment. I thought to lie,  
but what's the point?

EVEN MY MUSE WHISPERS

The vet reminded me again,  
putative dog or no, living housebroken  
will eventually cramp your style.  
You will likely howl down the moon,  
take to the woods instinctively.

As I stand shuddering in the clustering  
dark, the snow blows Arctic-wild;  
you are a phantom now, far ahead of me.  
I know I have not the strength to catch  
up to you; I believe you know it too.  
I wonder if this is the time,  
the night you will go,  
when I hear you.

You start howling  
as I've never heard before.  
There is a longing in this noise  
that is palpable, and in seconds,  
I know why—you are answered  
in kind by one, then two  
then several others, then more  
than I can count—a *pack* of wolves.  
Oddly, all I can think is,  
you are about to exchange  
one type of domesticity for another,  
and, though my heart is happy for you,  
I can't tell if my face is wet with  
snow melting or if it's tears.

**BEFORE SELLING THE FAMILY HOME**

*Memory is the scribe of the soul. Aristotle*

I find barnacles on the bottom of our old sailboat  
upturned tortoise-style in the backyard;  
they are brittle as a gang of great-grandmothers  
and easily scraped off with my bare hands.

I fire them effortlessly like I used to throw  
snowballs over the peak of our bungalow roof,  
now burnished copper, drenched by sunlight  
soon departing the day.

The yard becomes a blur once the sun deserts the sky, and,  
until my eyes adjust to dusk's bathing every blessed thing,  
I see mother lying beneath the elm, her skin the chalky colour  
last it was once they cut her down.

Even blinking quickly will not dispel that flinty image,  
and tears long thought dried sit bitter on my tongue.  
It's hard not to think about the men swaddling her like a mummy.  
No, no—more like something cocooned really—before taking her.

**your leaving scars me still**

*after rob mclennan's "the girl from abbotsford"*

two years one month four days  
i waken, my hand on your pillow  
still lonely for your warmth

your cat curls at my feet  
but is still not my cat does not  
purr ever — awaits your return

i continue to lose weight  
food does not interest me  
nothing does really—

i am holding your taste  
like a verb on my tongue  
afraid to swallow your tense

i wonder how long it takes  
for wounds to fully heal  
and if scars ever fade

perhaps they are all  
that keep me here remind  
me of you, that i was loved

**SO I SAYS TO MY MUSES**

Now you come around?  
Now you show up?  
When I would least  
like to see any one  
of you—  
Now here you come,  
toting metaphors  
and similes  
gaily behind your  
pretty selves.  
Now you tempt me  
with forms galore  
and rhyming schemes  
and other poetic devices  
you never usually  
bring around.  
Now, when I feel like  
writing something  
truly horrid,  
(alright, admittedly,  
it's a prompt – but still)  
the nine of you  
are playing the old,  
“Pick me, pick me”  
“I'll make you famous”  
“It will be fun!”  
“How about some  
enjambment?”  
“You know how  
you do love that—”  
And on and on.  
You witches, you bitches,  
you out and out mean-girls—  
leave me be now..