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Heron-Woman

This gift of story
From your mother's old country
Tells the songs behind my ears
To unfurl white wings
Of the Great Heron.

Water has the texture of memory:
Once, a child listened to her father
Call the herons from the green paddies.

In the silence of attention,
I am Heron-Woman,
Weaving feathers into silk,
Shimmering like the waters
Of the blue estuary.

At twilight I glide to shore,
Fold my body into
The sheath of solitude.
Slender in vigil,
I dream of light
Catch the flash
Of quicksilver
In water.

And I
Am still
Once
More.

Ichigo Ichie

He comes with her up to her room
On the fourth floor, near the narra
Flowering outside the glass windows.

He wears yellow like the tree outside
Inside her room.

As she pours coffee, *Exquisito*,
She asks herself how to temper
Pleasure. Where was she taught readiness
For these gestures?

He sits attentive to soft angles
Formed by wrist, right hand, elbow —
Ceremonial, as if this were
An old tea ritual.

The back of her hand burns
From his gaze. The coffee spills
Spoils the possible
Point of perfection.

And she, in silent time curves back
To herself into this room, within
That other room they knew a long time ago
Near the ginkgo garden.

She wishes to ask him if he remembers
Izumi, or desire's archaic language
But keeps her peace. Until his eyes slant
Into hers and he asks:
Do you speak Japanese?

Sounds of leaves, colors changing
Reel them both back in, there
Where she has learned to trust
The unsaid things. She looks boldly back
At him to tell what seems
A little truth, a little lie:
S'koshi — a little
Somewhere in-between.

And then he smiles.

The Gift

This gift is shaped like a riddle
 Made for a child's treasure hunt
 On mid-autumn mooncake night.

The clues are written on rice paper,
 White as the powder on the faces
 Of Utamaro's floating beauties.

Why are there two scarlet macaws
 And a toco toucan perched high
 On the notes of seventeen syllables?

These tropic details must be pure
 Distraction: riddle's way of unsaying
 What it must not point directly to.

Carefully then, I guess at hints,
 Sounds seventeen syllables make
 On the mind's tatami floor.

This gift is shaped like the geta
 I left on the right side of the temple
 Door. Are the silver sounds of bells
 Calling me back to Arashiyama?

Origami

This word unfolds, gathers up wind
 To speed the crane's flight
 North of my sun to you.

I shape this poem
 Out of paper, folding
 Distances between our seasons.

This poem is a crane.
 When its wings unfold
 The paper will be pure and empty.

**Sagada Stills
In A FloatingWorld**

If with images

If with words

I

You

could catch

on photographic film

on silk paper

a likeness

of You

of Me

in Sagada

I would have

You would have

to sit a thousand years
with master of austere

Light

Measure

Masferre

Shikibu

to learn the process

of rendering

of staining

Silence

Sound.

Cancer Ward

In a room of my mind,
I talk with you for hours,
Wake stars in the blood,
Bloom red flowers
In the marrow.

This room sits here,
Like all the rooms
Women wait in, empty.

We could paint this room
Off-white, erase all colors
Or words from the slate of memory.

In this waiting room
I sit like a stone angel,
And with extra-vision project
Light onto the negatives.

I heal miraculous,
Firespirits brave the dark.
Your living matter will be
Crowned with blazing rubies.

Tension Luminosa

(after Fernando Zobel)

Wilderness of grey contained
in the canvas of November,
lured by the gypsy moon of Cuenca.
In the moving strokes, Lorca's eye
discerns the lyric of a void dance:

Two presences so still, they assume
no form but pure image,
or incurable wound of music.

Only with the ear of a true *cantor*
may we hear the firewinds howl
beyond this ash-filled frame.
Could a terrible love have been
marked by this one luminous
drop of blood?

Biometrics

Such distress over the story of mist nets,
Strung 120 meters wide to catch the birds
Visiting the wetlands of Olango in April.

Time for plovers to breed in the Arctic
And this island feeds and rests them
On their northward flight to Siberia.

The scientists call this bird-banding season,
Rare chance to lure each curve of flight
And measure wingspan, winglength, weight,

Then slip the footring through for tracking
As far as Australia or back again. The procedure
Has many uses, for birds' sake. But

There's a catch: sometimes sudden storms
Come in summer, and the poor trackers
Have to stand in lightning's way

To free the birds,
Stranded in mist that wouldn't give
Fair and easy passage to wings.