

May It All Be Poetry

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THE PEARS SAT IN BLACK PLASTIC, their bell-shaped bodies heaped on top of one another. It was their colour, flushed red freckles on yellow-green, that drew me to them. And it was their size—small, perfectly scaled—that made me pick one up and cup it in my palm. The grocery store label read, “Forelle Pears.” I had never heard of them before, never thought of a pear being so tiny, never seen a fruit look so much like cheeks blushing from the cold. I was curious and needed to learn more about them—their story.

Forelle—the German word for trout. The red pores of the pear like the bright scales of a rainbow trout. The second smallest variety of pear, only larger than the diminutive Seckel. I stood in the produce section, my phone back in my pocket and pear still in hand, with a new appreciation for this fish-named fruit. To think of all the times I’d mindlessly walked through the grocery store, hurriedly filling my basket, bored by the drone of routine, when these pears, this little detail, had been sitting there, waiting patiently to please.

I value moments like these. Moments when you’re not expecting much, but somehow the everyday sits shining before you—time stills, your attention finely focused, finally tuned to only one thing. I know seeing a small pear in the store seems insignificant, hardly worth recounting, but this instance fits into a larger story: I haven’t always found solace in the things around me—I’ve often been overwhelmed by them.

When I was two it was trucks and dogs. There was construction on the street outside my bedroom window, creating a stream of rumbling trucks, blaring back-up beeps, and shouting construction workers. My mom would try and put me down for an afternoon nap only to be met with cries of, “It’s too loud! It’s too loud!” Weekly indoor playground was sometimes overstimulating, with all the slobbering kids yelling and fighting over toys. Instead of joining the other teetering toddlers, I would sit on the coffee carpet with the adults. I’d stay close to my mom’s legs, quietly sitting, the odd toy around me, listening to their soft chatter.

When I was in elementary school, I traded trucks for white cars—especially Dodge Grand Caravans. Like a bird watcher positioning themselves to get the best view of the trees, I would pace the playground, eyeing the streets. Glenora School was a prime location for a car watcher, caught between two busy roads: 102 Ave. and Stony Plain. Six white cars in fifteen minutes. While a bird watcher would be thrilled to see the shadow of a rare bird flying overhead, I felt sick at the sight of a white car. The teachers told us a man driving a white van had approached a neighbourhood girl. Nothing had happened, but I couldn’t let the story go. I wasn’t a car watcher because I loved cars, but because I was convinced that if I wasn’t, I would be kidnapped. I wished recess wasn’t so long, I wished I could stay inside, I wished the chain-link fence around the schoolyard was stronger, taller—like a wall around a castle, impassable.

Every day felt so uncertain. Would I be kidnapped? What if I grew up to be a kidnapper? Wouldn’t that be ironic—how would I live with myself? Would my parents and sister be safe? Would I be able to fall asleep tonight? Would I get a migraine? Or did I already have a headache? Should I just take an Advil? Was I becoming addicted to Advil? Was that even possible?

Junior high wasn’t easier. To try to cope with everything going on around me, I began imposing my own order. My ritualistic structure was initially relieving, something I could count on. My shower door had a pattern of tiny squares, 158 in total, and each morning before towelling off I felt



the need to touch every square—who knew what would happen if I didn't? And if I said the word “hopefully,” I couldn't just say it once—it would need to be repeated twice more. Keeping track of all the things I needed to do quickly became time consuming, and I was tired of all the stomach-sinking feelings if I forgot something.

Things got better in high school. I found a new way of bringing order and meaning to my thoughts and observations: writing. In Grade 10, our English teacher had us read some of Pablo Neruda's odes: his ode to socks, or an artichoke, or a large tuna in the market. I don't know how she chose which poems we were to read; Neruda wrote 225 odes, after dedicating himself in his late forties to writing one every week. She then turned us outside to write an ode of our own. It demanded concentration and clarity. I chose a mosquito. It was strange, taking something familiar and trying to examine it with such care that for a while the subject seemed foreign. Like adjusting a lens to bring something into focus, but along the way the image becomes distorted, the subject sitting before you with such blinding transparency that it becomes almost unrecognizable. Writing the poem let me decide what light to cast the mosquito in, what words to attach to it, what story to tell. There was an orderliness to this, a way of making meaning out of the

things around me, a way of reframing my experiences. *Our greed overpowers, sheltering the rosy sustenance. Not sparing that single drop to swell your little belly. But if we did, what touched our hearts would be set free on the wings of a mosquito.*

Writing is not only a way of re-ordering the world but also the brain. The amygdala: essential for the response and memory of emotions, especially fear. Rats without an amygdala are unafraid, brazenly walking up to cats. Without an amygdala, would I have run up to dogs, and thundering trucks, and white vans? The pre-frontal cortex: the planner, the moderator. Researchers found that writing about a distressing emotion lessened activity in the amygdala and increased activity in the pre-frontal cortex. The brain's way of gaining control.

I started keeping a journal, writing down observations. Composing these narratives and lines of poetry kept my mind occupied and brought me some composure. I liked imagining the backstories of everyday objects and happenings, working the details of my life into a story I'd want to hear.

Like walking outside one day, caught breathless, the wind blowing hard across my face. The wind—a Robin Hood for breaths. Taking justice into its own hands, ►

redistributing air, whisking my breath away to someone who needed it more—maybe someone about to die, their family gathered around, wishing for just a little more time. The wind blows in all these captured breaths, the person's chest rising. Enough air for one more moment. I know this isn't how it happens. But at least I wasn't just walking, cold and winded—I had a story.

Other times it wasn't a story I was after, but just a string of words—their rhythm. I'd put them together, playing them over. *Go ahead and gild your jilted self in gold.* They kept me from worrying. *Sonorous—soulful sound so smooth, so loud, so lustrous.* I also wrote down things I'd overheard, phrases I liked the sound of. Some from advertisements. *Three-and-a-half-pound bags of California clementines.* Others from conversations. *Cockatiel skulls in a chocolate box.* Repeating these phrases, hearing them in my mind, was calming—grounding. Their rhythm, their internal rhyme, their alliteration, made me slow down and focus.

Focus—like when I was walking, just after a snow, the sidewalks smooth and white. As I glanced down, I saw it. My boot, kissing the toe of a footprint in the snow.

Someone, some stranger, had been out walking before me, leaving their impressions, and now I was toe-to-toe with their steps. A ghostly, intimate moment. I kept thinking about this for the rest of my walk. How on a there-and-back walk, you could, on your return, try to kiss all your footprints, your past selves. A way of reconciling with who you once were.

The pear, a green Anjou, sat on the kitchen table with its round bottom facing up. Stamped into its sweet skin was a single blemish, crescent-shaped. Like the slight curve of a fingernail, or the bowed hull of a ship, or the moon waning. The pear's pinprick pores no longer just lenticels, no longer just pathways for air to pass, but stars studding the sky. The pear, a universe contained, with a moon passing through phases like a person through life. And stars, shards of the sun shining. I held the pear in my hand over the kitchen sink, rubbing its body clean beneath a stream of water—washing away the cosmic dust. I raised the pear to my mouth, lips grazing its greenness, my front teeth breaking its soft skin. So long as an imperfection on the bottom of a pear can be a starry moon-night sky, I know it may all be poetry. 🍐