

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Michelle Bitting: Three Poems

Michelle Bitting · Thursday, August 25th, 2022

Poem for Philip on World Poetry Day, 2021

Sleeping with you every night
 Could never be tedious, no, it's as marvelous
 As the stars and milk you dust my coffee
 With each morning, and who but you
 Would rise, fill the mighty press, steep my French
 Roast with water roiled in an old Wolfgang
 Puck kettle you found at the seaside
 Thrift store because no one else wanted it
 With its chrome and polished wood trim—so 80's passé—
 People can get pretty snooty, but not us,
 Except maybe those moments I'm my own bad
 Shell, cracked and spoiling ochre on a burning sidewalk.
 You know, the first time we made love I studied
 Your face for a while at a dead dark hour, unconvinced
 You were lovely, your monument nose and epic jowls,
 The unchiseled neck of a passing pelican—but
 Aren't those birds my favorite now? And aren't I
 Framed in my tracks today, watching them
 Rembrandt the sky, cooking up shadows
 And light, brushing a small, unstoppable fire
 Across the heavens, every stroke a masterpiece, really.

*

Ode to my Dead Grandfather's Pail of Wild Bird Seed

Corrugated can we hauled back from the deserted home.
 Tin keeper of an avian buffet: millet, dandelion, sunflower
 for phoebe, towhee, sparrow. Little specks our guests
 now peck from the orbital ring atop cross-armed poles,
 backyard crucifix towered to thwart possum and rat,

hand painted by our son—a pandemic craft. Can you catch
 this, Grandpa? A drift of wings collects—feed for the godly
 rowing amid cumulus, cell tower, sky—our crepuscular
 hearts pierced. Don't ghosts get hungry, foraging among
 friends? Conservative-to-the-core Grandpa, a locked chest
 until stuck drawers opened in the dwindling end. A girl could get
 blue around the edges. But for the birds and garden, our laughing
 banter some days on full buzz, blooming as your time flew
 by and we minded roses and weather, relishing aromas
 beyond the box of ash you've become. I lift the lid and let
 warblers keep court, celebrate starlings and juncos plucking
 the yard for life—poop and lint and thistle twig nesting planets
 in the eaves, the crescendo of finch song that feathers light
 into shadow, scoring paths to higher spheres, overriding sour
 notes like fallen eggs from family branches. Grandpa, what I'm
 trying to say: innocence lost is sometimes offered in a hand
 of seed held out—*something happening to the spirit called mercy*—
 our creaturely bodies, however fleeting, taking it in.

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Epistle to Hedera

~ genus of a dozen grasping plant species

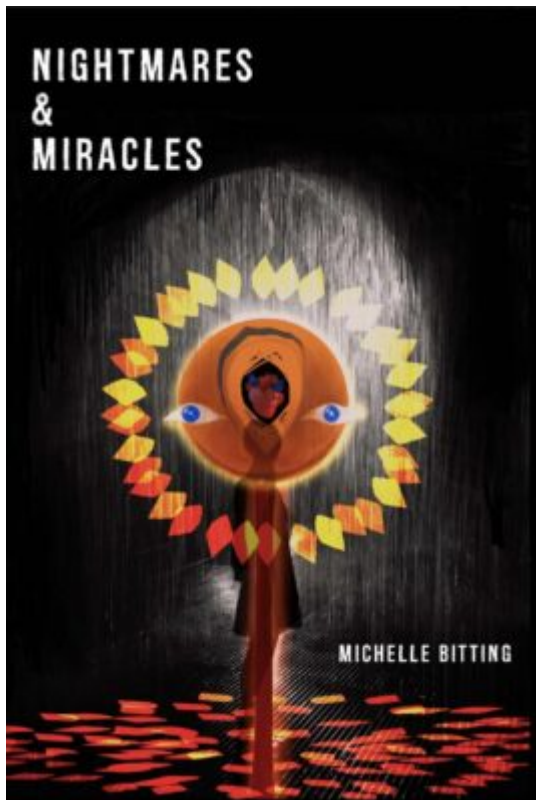
Dear English Ivy, woody vine from Europe with
 the perennial bad wrap, invasive green and domineering
 id stalking the neighbor's garden. Dear tough
 root systems and leaves that scale and topple fences,

dark underworlds wrought for snails and worms to
roam, rats to run. Are we done yet? Even the birds
are in cahoots, smuggling seeds on daily routes
from bush to bed and back, winged abettors to a riot
of emerald hands up the trunks of deciduous mothers
like needy children at season's end when she's released
her foliage guard. Dear canopy shroud of verdant
shimmering the old crone casts to forest floor, claiming
the shady understory, suckling winter's veins of thinning
light inside dungeons of time. Do I know you? I'm told
your fruit is toxic to humans and livestock; your sap
we can't escape will irritate skin. Well, haven't I drunk
the sun's elixir, jumped up and down the muddy diurnal
slopes, the stalks of my young legs electric with chlorophyll,
arches tender from grinding blade and cell to cytoplasmic sludge?
I stained my cheeks and mouth with it, high on medicinal
fumes converted for strength to sugar in my heart's obscured
rooms. Isn't this how wounds heal, wisdom grows, until
meditations on feral evils open to mind what's entombed—
brightness socked in steepness, scars that kick through loam,
blooming lattices to stars? In the beginning, there was grass,
before your spun stems of intractable webbing, before drought
and cost of sprinkling said no to extra water, yes to a drier wild.
And with the grass, a family of deer that appeared to graze
the hillside one day, their gradual decimation of fragile netting
against slag and slide we watched with horror in the rainy season.

This is our history. Dear Ivy, you won't remember, but I do—how
my husband would leap from our still-warm sheets and bolt
outside hollering Shoo! Shoo! His voice and hands hotly
clacking the air. How the doe turned her slender head
to note the interruption without budging until his calves
and bare ass quickened in her direction—the whole nude
and velvet bag of him—the taut and round and jangling parts—
the swirls of chiseled skin, ribboned marbles on chaotic parade
in the early haze and chill, an animal sprung from his cave,
warbling the native wood notes wildly as Milton and you, dear Ivy,
might say—tenacity—its uncivilized beauty
holding up the dream in the fiery dawn of our yard.

Photo credit: Alexis Rhone Fancher

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NIGHTMARES & MIRACLES by Michelle
Bitting

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