

Tanis MacDonald

MOBIL

poems



MOBILE

Tanis MacDonald

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1. SYBIL ELEGIES

ELEGY 1

In the city I long for, women
replete their origins. We do not
eke out evenings courting in parks.
The light does not ride
easy on us all. If only
we could learn not to love
meaning before we make it.
If only our ache
could arc like metal
in a microwave. If only
our exemplar was more
tectonic than catatonic.
Don't mind me. I throe
like a girl, cacophony's
blasted cadence. It's hard
to undo the centre when your
absence is
invisible.

*

Ai Weiwei's *Moon Chest*, like the Cabinet of Dr. Caligari, will show you all the phases if you bend to look. Don't be distracted by the texture of the quince wood. Don't be distracted by the word *quince*. (Not *quints*, though this is Canada.) It's okay if you squint. This is not like shopping for a bedroom set or agony.

I don't like it, she says, and wants me to agree. I point through the cut-outs to the phases ordered as a fanned deck. She won't even pretend to look until I walk between phases, a body dividing wood, then she gasps (I am nearly invisible though not yet silver) *you're the woman in the moon!*

Let me perch on the rim of my crater, your friendly neighbourhood menstrual symbol, footsore and ready to spit, Diana's arrow back from the Sea of Crises for a homecoming

between heaven and concrete. The city
will be judged and found
wanting, one more
way to say a woman's
body is neither null
nor void, of course. The moon
is always in transit.

*

The café's circus with
bread: the boy
with his camera, the stoner
staggering beneath
the weight of three bags
full, sir,
the girl in the purple Joy
Division T-shirt, the handsome
man smoking on the patio like
his drop-dead
life depends on the plume
lofting from his firm bottom
lip, curled pout checking
his status—still
not satisfied. The great minds of his
generation hysterical on
grande extra-hot latte, naked
in Gore-Tex. Say
he's smoked the official
dope before and after
it was legal and excited universal
admiration for his keen
grasp of the obvious. Say
those hipsters are angle-headed,
acute. Say the café has wait
staff younger than my
pants. They practise the kind
efficiency of trained
millennials, not eaten away by
the history we did not care
to know even as it hooked
and dragged us. Say then, we
who used to walk here, who stalked
these bricks, played it loose,
uncertain of our footing, led on by
swamp gas, foxfire
bravado.

ELEGY 2

I'd like to
thank the brave women
of this city for reminding
me fine ironic throes
aren't worth the bubble wrap
they came in. My newsfeed
says in Canada, a woman is
assaulted every fifteen minutes.

I believe it
down to the number
and frequency of
chases and scrapes and
oh come ons I heard the years
I could not reach
up to the poverty line, when
riding the subway was for
special occasions and I walked
the twenty blocks home from
my closing shift at 2:00 a.m.
because every dollar was too
hard to earn
to waste it on safety.

I know the dead
women persist, but not
through these bylaws.

I believe it
down to the number
of names and frequencies
on which we receive advice (Delta
Oscar November Tango) to stay in,
better to void
the scandal of being
than to call ourselves
bloodied, call ourselves
heroes by any other means.

*

I come from the place
beside the place
beneath the radar
those long
suburban blocks
in January dark
walking home with my skates
over my shoulder and
thinking of how fast a skate blade
sharpened that morning
would go through a neck
and I knew just the neck
and you knew him too
and you laughed at his jokes
so don't mistake me
for a girl who doesn't
know don't
think I am not
alive and counting
who died
walking home
from the store
or their part-time job
in the winter dark
don't idle your car by me
don't lean over the passenger seat
and say *hey, get in*
all I need is me
thanks I don't
want your kind
of lift

*

Call me a foot soldier
in an unregistered
army of young women walking
home from dirty jobs, grey
with grease, taking back
the night by ourselves
and not talking about
the skirted
subject
of cab fare.

It was rumoured among us
as a law never upheld
or even tested
that if you worked
late enough your boss was
legally bound to pay
for your cab home but no matter
how late I worked this never
happened though we repeated
this fake statute
among ourselves
and waited for those last
few
tables
to leave. Those
years, and every year,
someone was paid
much more than me
to remind me of
my job.

*

we roll forward dull
as tanks you shod us
you tipped us
you grimed us
you would not
notice a phalanx of your
servers and cleaners
on foot on the street
a regiment of working
class girls caught in
your rear-view
mirror we are
not even vanishing
points as you hit
the on-ramp
to the expressway
to the suburbs
and we flip
you the bird so many
times it looks like
a flock of seagulls
lifting our hands
up and away

ELEGY 3

the rules

never take the TTC after midnight
never live downtown

sui generis
we are all individuals together
never go to the park alone
if someone follows you, let your teeth chatter
he might believe you are someone

habeas corpus
never make eye contact
if he whistles
if he says he loves you
if he makes kissy sounds
you have the body
you are a citizen

dux femina facti
never go north of Eglinton
or to Scarborough
or to High Park
and never live
downtown
never live alone
never breathe alone
trust no one
especially old television slogans
the brute is out there
lead as you have been
followed

*

Cheap shoes did my back
no favours. Walking made me
suspect and available to
you've got to be kidding.
The city ushered me past
houses sleek with creams and
powders and carved
salad bowls and
other people's parents who
tossed the lettuce
just so. Lordly and masterly,
the city demanded my bone
scrapings every night.

When I read that walking
was a scholarly position,
that men understood
the city from their
strolls, I drew breath
(not for the first
time) to say *you can't have it
both ways.*

*

get your ear to the ground
this grassy hill
gets you down
to hear screams of women
beneath the green

as you are passing through
through passing as you are

beneath the green
screams of women
down you get to
here this grassy ear
to the getting ground

*

if you turn your ankle on
an angle turn it into
a virtue or turn it down

stretch stirrup
wrap bone
sculpt arch

that's a hallucis blunder
anatomy's bonenote
you'd better

toe the line
until your foot swells
put the pain in sprain

the distal fibula
knows where you livula