

Sparks

An earlier version of this poem appeared in the journal Oratorealis

A naked microphone upon a stage

think of it as a 21st-century campfire
and all of us are sparks
waiting to be unhusked by incandescent hollers
moving faster than the speed of profound

Let's breathe hot breath upon these embers
let's kill loneliness together
shine a light on one another so we may
recognize ourselves on the other side
of this shimmering flume

tell us of your arthritic rosary and
your shattered kneecaps full of prayer
sing us your dirty tantrum, your dance-hall love song
tell us the names of the places spoken in their mother tongues
the names of places more than 150 years old
the names that choke English into submission
and redraw the maps made by colonialism

teach us the histories of the people in the photos
on your refrigerator door. The mud-wrestling tournament,
the failed Amsterdam hashish experiment and why Fernando

wants to die in a field of red tulips

I want to know about the day you started loving yourself
and the next day when you didn't stop. I really
need to understand why you still wear your socks to bed
and I gotta hear about how you lost all your teeth

Teach us the fable of the coughing dog
and the secret of the one-eyed bat
that lives in your heart and protects the
bug-eating children of your trailer park

because I swear to whatever mask you pray

it's here with each word spoken, we push back
against the assimilation machine,
the bleached-out, pre-fab, white-bread gods of monoculture
we push back against the shroud

And yeah, I admit it, I'm in it for me
as much as I want it for you, maybe even more
I'm getting older, might die soon
I've got a lot of regrets. But being here

with you trying to be as human
as possible isn't one of them

If I could
I would have come to this national park of communion
a hell of a lot sooner, warmed my heart on your fire
years before, I would have fought harder against
the stapling of my tongue to the roof of my mouth
by every demon who ever abused me
I wouldn't have wandered in this world
as a ghost for so long

but that's the past and enough of that

bring us your broken cowbell, your tattered flag of semaphore
this is a rescue mission. We need to free
the frozen mermaid of your prairies. Don't waste
another moment lost in silence. Find the secret world
deep inside you.

Release your spark

PNE Love Affair

We met in the pirate ship's shadow
waiting for the rickety rickety

clickety clackety tracks
of the roly-poly roller coaster
to rumble down our spines

You were feeding those tiny doughnuts
to the Super-dogs while they were on smoke break
and I was voiding where prohibited
after one too many lemonades

You noticed a cigarette butt
in my urine trail and
remarked, "I used to smoke too"

It was all demolition derby after that. We
made love between the dumpsters
like two animals on the endangered species list
trying to keep our species alive

You French-kissed like a bullwhip
Your smile a death-row mirage
Your legs were scissors I wanted
To run with

Thirty years later
I know I should have gotten that tattoo
because I can't remember your name

Follow Your Dreams

Even if they seem ridiculous. Even if it means riding in a van driven by Alec Baldwin disguised as Donald Trump. You don't know where you're going but you're getting there in a hurry. You're breaking the speed limit and he sees you're worried so he says, "I'm Alec Baldwin, I can do anything." Just then you see a large pink truck with the word *Gorilla* in big block letters above the windshield heading toward you and as you make a left turn the truck hits you head on, slicing your van in half. You survive without a scratch but Alec Baldwin is dead. The energy inside you vibrates so wildly you float outside your skin. A child sits on

the sidewalk holding an AK47 and points it at you while being questioned by the police. The child points at you and says, "Merry Christmas."

Even if they seem unrealistic. Even if you're having dinner with your father and he looks younger and healthier than he has in years. Even if you tell him you're now a vegan and he starts yelling, "You grew up on a farm, we slaughtered animals! How can you turn your back on your family?" And you ask if you can just talk about it, you're terrified of food and what it does to your body, you don't want to die from a heart attack like he did, you don't want to get sick. This calms him down and he stares at you, says, "The only cure for cancer is death."

Even if they seem outlandish. Even if you're a soldier taking a knee in battle because you've had enough death and can't bring anyone back from hell and you realize you're carrying the grief of several lifetimes inside you and so you weep tears the size of mangoes and someone puts their hand on your shoulder and you cry even harder until your tears fill a lake that you stand on the edge of but are too terrified to swim in.

Even if they seem unattainable. Even if you're on a party bus with Madonna and she takes you to a backroom because she wants to seduce you and you go with her and as she crawls on top of you she puts a penis-shaped gummy in your mouth and you stop her and she says, "What's wrong?" and you say, "I don't want to be thought of as gay." And Madonna says, "Gay? You're worried about gay? Now? In the 21st century? Gay doesn't matter." And so, Mark Hamill joins you and Madonna in a threesome and everyone's sweating and groaning and you're humping Mark Hammill's leg like a dachshund. Then he rolls off you and Madonna's getting dressed and you're crying because you said "I love you" to both of them and neither one responded.

Even if they seem unreachable. Even if you're standing on the top of a mountain and from there you can see everything, the entire landscape of creation, the world laid out before you, **eternity in high definition**, from this place you have depth perception, and you ask yourself, "What do you know now that you never knew before?"

Even if they seem unavoidable. Even if they're **a recurring nightmare of a moose coming to kill you, their hooves pounding in your head like war drums**. It's your earliest memory and colours your worldview and everything that happens afterwards. Until nearly 50 years later when a random, drunken google search reveals that the thing you thought was out to kill you was actually coming to protect you, to take you into the underworld of your subconscious, far away from the rough and ugly country where children are molested. But the moose hid you so well you forgot who you are, and so the lies of the goblin-hearted stuck to you.

And their lies made you sick in your soul and you tried to kill your true self in every way that was offered. But somehow the echo of who you are kept calling and you reluctantly listened, even if every note of their song felt like a coat hanger being stabbed in your eardrums because you couldn't believe something so beautiful would want to speak to you. But you listened to their song anyway because the strength of their truth was more powerful than the lies, and one day a space opened up inside you to begin letting their symphony in. And maybe that crowbar is actually a sunflower. And now you are part moose. And maybe that dragon has become a love letter. And now you are your own medicine. And maybe the thing you feared the most will actually save you. And now you are your own redemption. Maybe the question is no longer "What do they want?" but "What do they have to offer?"