

Crystal Hurdle / TYMPANUM

TYMPANUM I: LISTENING

Newly assigned
one to the other,
the deaf student, his interpreter.

Daniel watches Laura.
He is barely aware
of her body, eyes, hair.
They, a wavering distraction
outside the periphery
of his tunnel vision.

He watches her sonorous hands,
an uncoiling of snakes writhing,
that shadow dance,
a bouquet of geese
languorous, then insistent,
beak biting beak.

On an invisible, foreshortened keyboard,
fingers dash, glide.
Fingers undulate, choreograph
letters, words, signs.
Fingers deconstruct.

Watch to hear.
Watch to listen.

TYMPANUM II:
ADAM'S APPLE

Daniel sprawls
eversilent
and Laura speaks for him
becomes a facade of self
a song river
sweet-voiced.

Formerly hers,
his voice is high-pitched
melodious as a linnet
startling as a crow
with its talk of
stiletto heels
penis size
stud services
oxymoronic in that ladylike trill
but for her glinting eyes,
bright as a bird's,
she does not
unlike voice, unlike ears
share.

TYMPANUM III:
PHALANGES

Through daily sacrifice,
Laura becomes mute
to give Daniel voice.

His hands, clever, dexterous, flexing,
grasp her larynx
as in a chokehold
when she, strangled, and
amputated from her own hands,
fingers extending and fluttering
in front of her, disembodied,
becomes his conduit.

It is good for a while
to become lost
to be sexless or not her sex
to be voiceless or not her voice
a calm river
a tunnel
a channel
to become channeler.

She works and plays with her yarns,
even in severed hands that resemble hooves,
testing a bright, textured leash

that flashes like fish scales
and glints of copper, silver, night sky,
yielding little
a symbiotic binding between the two.

Until deeper in the labyrinth
not of his own making,
she teases the bull, Daniel,
his nostrils flaring
into a strangled wheeze,
butting, butting into darkgreen walls of yew,
flagellates with thin ropes knotted
from a bloodied coil.

And threads her way
back
into her own phalanges
into her own voice
and weaves with her freshly pulsing hands
the bull in a small corner
wound under the loom
and weaves
glistening warp
burnished weft
into her own story
into her tapestry
her thrumming life.

TYMPANUM IV:
VOICES

Last night and the nights before,
to prepare for his English competency exam,
at his computer,
Daniel caught shining fishes
in an oily tight net, blackly intersticed.
They were from all
over the world.
Resplendent. Glimmering.
Fit for a crown.
He could see their splashing,
the increasing concentric circles
as they leapt in vain to elude,
feel their disquiet, the coolness
of the lakewater,
smell and taste the salty brine,
as he cast more widely,
but he could not hear
the thwacking as he stunned
them to make them his.
(Laura could if she so desired.)

Instead, he could see his wavering face
in their twitching, reflecting scales.
He carried whole schools
unconscious in the basketry
of his brain.

Today, the fishes stream
from his fingers
onto the pages of the exam booklet.
They are less resplendent and glimmering
than before capture,
but they sparkle like tiaras
and smell only mildly of fish.

He etches them to the page
with his spiky letters,
tall as spears, now
claiming them for his own.
The pen mightier than the sword,
a visual symbol of voice.
But deaf Daniel has no voice.

Today, the interpreter, Laura, reads
The Georgia Straight
trolling, trolling,
her eyes bright lures
her nails retractable hooks.

TYMPANUM V:
THE PRESENT

Plugged in, alone,
Daniel gazes at his computer,
its circuits wired into his fingers.
His eyes are his ears.
In the next room, Laura sits,
on call, waiting for his need.

Her air is querulous.
A dog yips, howls in loneliness.
Children bicycle
below every window,
Morse code in shrieks and yells,
voices high-pitched as faulty brakes.
A neighbour saws, leafblows
his immaculate driveway,
pounds on gravel with a shovel
to kill baby weeds.

Laura glissades, clockwise, counter-clockwise,
from room to room, though not David's,
like a cat seeking choice sun spots,
but noise is everywhere, punishing.
A toddler whines, his little sister
bellows in sympathy.
The earth shudders
with bruising busses roaring

with fibreboard houses
crying into erection
from below ground
with freshly excavated foundations
screaming brotherly entreaties
from down the street.
Thirteen hour construction days.

Now, she awakes too early, too too too
to hammers in the head.
The sparks and oily smoke
of power tools bespeak rage, outrage.
All is cacophony.
The thin trickle of CBC
is thwarted, dammed.

She is waterboned, tearful,
longing for the silent swish
of the inside of her brain,
a quiet centering.
A cessation, pleas, please,
anything for a pause
like a long intake of breath
quiet as nourishing as necessary as air.
Gulping draughts.

She thinks of Daniel.
She envies Daniel.
She stands on his room's threshold.

If she could she would
pluck out her eardrums,
place one on each index finger,
like inverted contact lenses, petal thin,
like low begging bowls of burnished light,
lacquered oriental rich with saltwater alms,
glistening, capable of holding
twin small treasures.

Then, if Daniel looks away from
the computer screen,
Laura will enter his room,
proffering,
and tell him
It is a gift.