

Three Poems

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Habitual

A crowd is a sharp cut in the rocks.
What came in on the air this morning?
Dung and past lives. Rejected

pollen, poor seeds, such statistics
for life, and we don't even know how
water is drawn up. An overflowing cup

poured in planetary haste.
Some spilled. No coaster. The rings
we leave remind children—

everything stains. Lifetimes
collecting rubbish on shelves.
No one sees the spot once buried.

Keep living tidy. Keep dying tidy.
Keep tidy keep tidy.
The masses caught up.

Politics

We went to a banquet hall with all the politicians. There were millions of empty, crumpled soda cans and plastic bottles strung up on wires, lining the room. *All of these were pulled from the Ottawa river*, a woman proclaims into a microphone. *The river is full of carcinogens, so all the fish are dying.* The room sighs. My boyfriend and I cast sideways glances to each other, get up, leave. We go to the river. The waterfall portion exists inside a cave, with a footpath on either side and fashionable light fixtures bolted into the weeping rock past the mouth of the cave. Past the mouth of the cave, the river takes a slow downward turn, splitting into three offshoots that meet at a dam. There, the water is thick with bright bodies—yellow and striped with effervescent scales, all dead and sloshing against the concrete. We stand at the edge of the river as fish tumble towards the mass grave. *The pollution is a distraction*, I say. *The city just doesn't want to pay to remove the dam.* As I'm speaking, a server walks by with four hedgehogs on a tray. *Anyone want a hedgehog?* she bellows. Her voice ricochets around the room. I grab and hold one like a hamburger. I stare into his small eyes. There is a heavy lump inside of him, so I flip him over to inspect. He is an iPhone. He's unlocked, and I accidentally begin reading incoming texts. I quickly turn the phone back over, back into a hedgehog, and he leaps onto my forearm, latches his mouth to my skin. It doesn't hurt so I laugh and let him be. But the server runs over and says, *You shouldn't let him do that.* I pull him off. My skin comes with him. A pale red tube of my flesh connects us. He finally detaches after a good hard yank, and my skin slowly rejoins my body as I reconsider ownership. I slip back into myself. The leaving makes no mark.

Love Interest

I am the Protagonist here, so of course, I look unlike myself. At school, they hand us a diagram with a blank space underneath to describe it. I see warfare—nondescript innocents, cut limbs, red puddle—and far away, one lone body fleeing on foot. She's almost to the woods. *No!* Teacher screams. She slams her hands on my desk. *The dead are the righteous. God smiles at those who lay down meekly and accept such beautiful pain. This one though, jabbing at the lonely girl, so close to the treeline, is disgraced and lost to God. She cannot escape God's justice. Write of how she will be found.* Later, I'm caught with my earrings, yellow feathers that brush my shoulders, and Teacher sends me to the cliffs. Hundreds of people toss items into the waves below. Family photos and sentimental knick-knacks and wedding rings and themselves. The edges are slanted, and the rock is loose from the constant weary footfall. Some fly with their treasures willingly. They are conspicuously quiet. Others crawl weeping to the edge but as they back away, a rock crumbles, or an armed guard kicks them, or they forget how to fight for life, and these are the ones who fall screaming. As I near the edge, I am crying too. I don't want to fall. I don't want to lose my last colourful object. A guard walks up behind me, whispers, *Pretend to throw them. Hand them to me. I will find you later.* He must be the Mismatched Love Interest. I only catch a glimpse of his face as I press the feathers into his hand. He leaves, and I mime losing everything. My hand is empty either way.