

Two poems

Jónína Kirton

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Jónína Kirton is a Métis/Icelandic poet/author and facilitator. Born in Treaty One (Portage la Prairie, Manitoba) she currently lives in the unceded territory of the Musqueam, SKwxwú7mesh, and Tsleil-Waututh. A Room Magazine Editorial Board member she is one of the co-founders of their new reading series, Indigenous Brilliance, an exciting new partnership between Room and Massy Books. She is also the curator of their new online poetry series, Turtle Island Responds. Kirton received the 2016 Vancouver's Mayor's Arts Award for an Emerging Artist in the Literary Arts category. She was sixty when she published her first collection of poetry with Talonbooks in 2015. Much to her delight, *page as bone ~ ink as blood*, has received some critical acclaim. Two years later she brought us her second collection, *An Honest Woman*, again with Talonbooks. The book was a finalist in the Dorothy Livesay Poetry Prize. Betsy Warland had this to say about *An Honest Woman*: "Kirton picks over how she was raised familially and culturally like a crime scene." Apparently, all that dreaming about being a Nancy Drew when she grew up did come to fruition. Just not the way she thought it would as a child.

I'm in Iceland darling

they have poetry in the bathroom
uncredited text on blocks of wood
cheeky commentaries on life
some chilling reminders
that those who live on shifting ground
take their poetry seriously

it is Christmas here
in the mall there is red
there is wool some shiny objects
silver adornments for trees and tabletops
I find a coffee shop where I sit I listen to words I do not understand
their feel familiar and I want to lean in

I do not know if my grandmother spoke these words
I do not know if I have heard this before
all I know is that I am leaning into her
and that everywhere I go I look for her face

I find her at a dinner party
she is pretty and I am glad
would she have been single too
a photographer not a farmer with seventeen children
this apartment could have been hers
the old furniture the artwork passed down
my grandmother had nothing to give me but love
and a cheque for \$200 carefully noted in her will
the cost of diaspora long forgotten there are no accounting methods
to track what was lost language the first to go
the passing down of heirlooms some carved wood
filled with the stories that were in the hands of the maker
and now live on in the wood a telling of another sort

my grandmother's mother came with nothing not even a mother
her father reluctant to claim her listed as nanny not daughter
listed as nanny not sister her mother lost
went missing in the country where we take a drive
I look for her, but she is not there

I am here to be a witness to the past
I stand where my ancestors once stood
outdoor governing a gathering place
named Althingi
here the land, the gods
the little people honoured

a short walk and
there is magic
waters
dark and deep
we share a coin
make a wish

the land is filled with silence yet it never stops talking
tells me it knows me that I belong to its past

the pristine snow and the heat of the earth
brings geyser remembrances
the gushing of watery words made white hot
by those who do not live brown
my skin erupts steam escapes from my mouth

I feel the burning

the lava words of my aunties and uncles
the way they slow crawl just below my skin

I am a volcano on an island

I became my own island

I have always been between
the wombs of my grandmothers
offered two worlds one with circles
where we lay ourselves open
to the warmth of a fire
the other a burning of another sort
both sides made strong by storytelling
by a connection to the land of their ancestors
each a reflection of circumstances
black sand beaches sharp salt
cold water peninsulas pointing to Canada
where voyagers from both side ventured some stayed
both sides made strong by storytelling
by a connection to the land of their ancestors
and a place called Turtle Island

Where I come from

I come from the days when NOT breast feeding was considered
a progressive act one that led to my mother and her sisters pill box hats
in black and white photographs you cannot see the yellow
shoes and matching bag or the slick silk
or their husband's hands slipping sliding to unzipper
sheath dresses never to be worn cooking

high school cookbooks asked us
not to speak of our day
to remember that
our husband had long hours
in offices with secretaries
and that work often included evenings
dinner and drinks overnight excursions
and we were cautioned against asking
where had he been?

indoctrinated by mothers that presented daughters
with advertisements found in magazines filled
with real wives - one of them my aunt
hair done in blonde pin curls swirls of femininity paired
with a smart looking dress and apron

in this photo filled promise my auntie stands
next to the latest model of stove modern meant to entice all women
with hopes of a "Leave it to Beaver" life in the suburbs
where she and the other wives will sink
into gripe water evenings with children
with their Vicks Vaporub chests heated to perfection
their casserole kitchens decorated in gold and olive-green brocade
and the matching canisters lined up near a cookie jar waiting to be filled
their "a woman's work is never done" lives could be replaced

by men
who buy
modern
appliances

my aunt and her coffee, tea or me life upgraded
to kitchen now serving one

instead of many

she got her life filled with modern appliances
and housekeepers that she could be kind to

how many times did she say...

“it is just as easy to love a rich man as it is to love a poor man.”

how many times did she say...

“you made your bed you lie in it”

as her chair was kicked out from under her
in a public place the rich man
the one ‘easy to love’ caused her to fall
to the floor like a tree in the forest

some would say
that no one heard
the crashing

how the waiters must have clucked when alone
and free to discuss this ‘accident’ of her own making
they all know that next visit auntie and uncle are to be greeted
with the customary Welcome Mr and Mrs....
their table waiting with the candlelight meant to dim the view
of the waiters who are witnesses made complicit by tips
from mothers and fathers who may have also been

paid to stand silent
next to tables tattooed
in disappearing ink

diamonds are a girl’s best friend

these words etched on the skin of our silence
cautioned daily not to speak publicly of suburbia
or the dreams that did not could come true

we all learned
that alternative endings
can be offered
some included romance
a lovers spat made right by flowers or furs
diamonds offered as evidence

of love