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Kitsune

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Gift from Queenie, May She Rest in Peace

She gave me a box of bath salts like uncut emeralds
pulverised to powder – greyish-blue and gritty.
I put them, with the clementine from my stocking,
at the bottom of my list of favourite gifts,
and forgot them. Only now, years later, do I run
them under water, worry they are so ancient
they will stain my skin. Worse – lace the heat
with arsenic green, leak an Aztec hex into the suds,
turning me as mean as their giver. I soak for hours
until I look as old as her, like wrinkled fruit;
until I see her face in mine and feel my heart contract.

Mesmerism

Not rich rich. Rich as a pensioner
who owns her own flat, rich as the
rare chance to enjoy a laugh.

Her true wealth, the wealth she values,
is a glass vase of a blue so spellbinding
it deserves a better name than *blue*.

“Indigo,” she says, drawing it out – “In-di-go.”
Plain glass, but in delicious thrall
to buried ice, to imperial Persia.

A streak of midnight on the mantel,
it warps her face into a fairground pitchman’s –
acquisitive, all deep lines and nose –

until she *is* the pitchman,
a blackguard rolling bills between his palms,
never far from his reflection.

The Boy Who Found Fear

Boy made of sand
carries a black swan underarm
to jimmy windows, lift
all those little rubies
that wink in the small hours like digital clocks.
And as he crosses thresholds, lintels,
the grains of him unpick steadily
through the night,
ticking minutes, seconds
till he's caught.

The man and his wife
get home. There he is –
black feathers on the floor,
pile of sand so powder-white
it makes them recall their Gold
Coast honeymoon and weep.
The thieving boy! They sweep him up
into a pan, chuck him out.
He can't speak to tell them: *Stop,*
I'm sorry. A real boy at last.

Sunrise over Lunan Bay

The audible clink inside a bulb
as it ceases to fire.

Glass egg. It's always a performance,
a morning like this, opals in the east
and then a swarm of rain.

I eat a wet baguette on the beach.
Last night's wine dies in me,
last night's watered-down talk.
The sun struggles to get up. I applaud
the effort. My knuckles are raw

from forgetting to pack gloves.
When I have ideas they always stall like this –
with an apology, an audible clink
above the waves, something small
ceasing to fire.

The Specious Present

The short duration of which we are immediately and incessantly sensible.

William James

He'll never get to Myrtle Farm today,
he thinks. He woke up with the bloody shakes.

Not today, he thinks. The duvet's calling
as prickly and cloying as a thicket,
clock hands tremble on the same damn minute,
while trees overhanging the stable roof
dangle burly limbs to drop in a storm
and he can't begin to lift the chainsaw.

Tomorrow, he thinks. He'll drive Long Furlong
willing the milometer to whizz round
those miles to where the A27
nuzzles the Downs and white slip roads lead to
Myrtle Farm and Myrtle Farm lies in state
like a lovely embalmed Eva Perón.

Empire of Sundaes

Swallow your coke-float:
drowned swans of cream, subsiding

bergs, long-handled spoon
to herd lumps into nullity.

The tall glass is planed,
glacial, sweating beads.

Sweet, corrosively sweet,
this urge to live in the past,

to guzzle a fizz of days
spent in a shallow pool

that lingers on the palate
more potent than the days themselves.

Eat me. Drink me.
I am delicious ice.