

Poetry Series

Chi
- poems -

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Chi(July 12)

I'm alive and I live in Cabot, VT. I practice gardening to attach myself to the earth and to the birds and green eaters, run two farm houses and teach English Composition at high school.

A Chipmunk Barks At Me

Now I understand why the chipmunk barked at me,
though all I could do then was to wait at the porch,
and watch her on her enhanced position on the board
below the unfinished ceiling,
to see if her message could somehow get to me.

No amount of wondering made me understand
her restless barking and chucking
(I had never heard or seen a chipmunk bark,
to talk of one doing so at a human)
even watching close her eyes and look, and her bobbing tail,
which was freed as she stood on her hind-legs.

She went on for a couple of minutes or so, vociferous and insistent,
unafraid unlike the meerkats or squirrels
I'm familiar with in game parks.

Now, having enquired from friends, being no natural historian,
I know chipmunks that co-exist around human homes,
bark at cats and pets when they see 'their territory' invaded.

But that was not the case as
we had co-existed for a single winter,
by-passing each other (though she preferred escaping
whenever she saw me going in or coming out) ,
never intruding on each other's life.

Perhaps it were the plentiful cashew nuts that never
got finished in the bowl on the table -
which she found one morning after I left the door open -
the challenging cork,
the breaking of which sharpens the teeth,
and perhaps enhances the taste
when it is eaten.

Or perhaps the cupful of pumpkin seeds
which I forgot on the veranda
while going out for spring planting,
and which she readily found and greedily feasted on.

It made short shrift of the barks for so short a time, I realized,
tearing and shredding them without method -
all for the seeds.

By shutting the door and windows,
we might have locked out the chipmunk
from the feast of the 'first fruits'.

She had searched for an opening to the house in vain,
(I later learnt) ,
scratched at the windows and the doors,
searched under the ceiling boards,
before confronting me when I came home.

'Why, oh why! '

The bark had left me confused.
At first I thought it was because I was darker, different –
thus a fitting welcome to a black prince, maybe,
or a warning that I was unwelcome and should get out of here.
Or was it the cashew nuts, or the pumpkin seeds?

I talked to visitors at diner - a sumptuous tropical dish
I made with pumpkin seeds from the supermarket-
and they all agreed that the chipmunk had intended a friendly greeting –

they'd never seen or heard of one barking and chucking,
which made me wonder again why the little chipmunk
had not barked at anyone before as a sign of appreciation?

Whatever the chipmunk intended communicating,
the door and the windows gave her a strong message.

I have not seen her on the porch again. The last time I saw her,
she was running across the yard, tail bobbing in the wind,
passing straight under the car,
and then climbing up an incline and disappearing into the woods.

(unrevised) .

Chi

A Silk Moth's Heaven

For the drunken giant silk moths
that flutter and crash headstrong
against the lit panes,

or who lie, wing-pinned
against the glass - outside the house -
in mock crucifixion,

and ogle with tacky eyes
at the world inside,
the dazzling lights on the ceiling
around which they imagine
the bandari trance dance all night,

for them,
this space where I sit and idle
under the lamp shade,
in the solitude of a pensive
and often edgy eunuch,

'is' paradise.

Chi

An American's View Of Europe, From Berlin - 06-19-06 (A Found Poem)

The Croats are tanned,
the Swedes pink,
the Poles the color of powder.

They hoist the flags of their nations
and trundle like tiny,
sweating armies under the sun.

The beer comes in big cups,
and the boats on the River Spree
glide past with music and accents
of Italian, French and German.

A Finn paints himself blue
and races through the boulevard leading
to the Brandenburg Gate -

Past Poles painted red
and Dutch painted orange,
past flags snapping in trees and songs
drifting into the dusk.

A German with a Dr. Seuss hat
dyed in his native colors
sips a beer and looks to a gigantic TV
where a ball arcs toward a net
with incredible speed.

Chi

And What If We Were All Gods?

What if our dreams became reality
and our reality became dreams?

What if the wind had its way
(from what it does to umbrellas)
and the rain fell skywards,
and the rivers, seas and oceans
existed in outer space
rather than on earth?

What if we were the animals
or birds we dreamt of?

And what if we were all Gods?

Chi

Black Tax

Do the garbage – that’s me.□
Discard the empty boxes – that’s me.□
Crush the garbage in the dumpster –
that’s me.

Fill in the ads - that's me.
Fill the empty shelves
with promotional items – that’s me.
Check the prices of `items not on file’ –
that’s me running helpless.

Help the dying put their items
from their carts into their trunks – that’s
also me.
Bring in the carts – I’m the cart boy.
IC3 – that’s me with a smile.

Fill in the cooler – that’s me.
Check the outdates of the dairy items – that’s me.
Baby oil the cooler, the doors, and side panels – that’s me.
Dust mop the store floor – that’s me.

Spot mop the store floor – that’s also me.
Vacuum the vestibule - that’s me.
Distribute the baskets equally round the store – that’s me.

Come at five thirty for trucking – that’s me.
Never call in because you’re stoned dead – that’s me.
The press comes tomorrow: you have to hold the banner! - that's also me.

Take the blame for all that’s wrong –
that’s me.
“Cut your complaints! ” – Alleluia!

Chi

Fog 1

The fog comes as we talk,
settles between us
and hides you from me.

It listens for a while,

then passes on, down
the street without a word,

and without taking along,
its trailing dress.

Chi

Hitching Post (Found Poem)

White divorced Christian
lady or mother,
despondent
with waking up alone.

Would swap corporate suits,
high heels and air-
conditioned offices
for the cries
of newborn lambs,

the smell of rain
on the newly ploughed fields,

the feeling of freedom,
sun and wind -

as she rides her horse.

She wants to share,
more than just
a bottle of wine.

April, 1998, Hogsback, South Africa.

Chi

Mosquitoes And Blackflies

Where do we draw the line
between living things that we kill,
and those we let live?

I am tortured
when I unwittingly kill a ladybug
or mistakenly stick it with paint as it sleeps
(you know how 'invasive' they are at spring time
if you work in home restoration) .

I am tortured when I unwittingly step
over a busy ant, then see it fall limp
after striving to wake up and carry on.

The black flies and mosquitoes
that bay for my blood when I work?
I clap at them with both hands,
and tell myself: 'I do this in self-defense'

But deep down the guilt persists:

'Must thou kill? What right do you have
to take away life freely given by another?
Is it because you feel like a lord of creation? '

And so I worry often.

And sometimes I have tried to save
some of the insects I have unwittingly hurt.
I remember one desperate moment
I got a fly stuck in paint,
and after I failed to save it,
and it wouldn't give up, I wondered aloud
if there were a hospital for insects, maybe I could have-

then I let go my stupidities.

That would be too much for my friends to bear,
if they could hear that.

But where do you draw the line
between living things that you kill,
and those you let live?

Chi

Nocturnes

All night, insects and pipers sing in the marshes,
and the little wet ponds in the woods.
They sing, as if the night wouldn't be night
without their songs.

Often, I have wondered if they sing for comfort
against the dreadful tentacles that find their way
in the dark molecules of impalpable night;
to attract the opposite sex, to mate, to procreate,
to write against the night; or simply, for the sake of song,
communion, life.

I wonder why humans sleep at night.

I wonder if there are songs too under the ocean floor
at night.

Chi

Rain Weed

The ice thaws,
the first spring rain falls.

Then the gout weed
sings a song of green

that none else
can exterminate.

Chi

Singing With The Country Road

At eight to nine pm, I am alone,
on the part-gravel part-tarred road,
no car ahead of me,
none behind.

From the farm house to home,
it's is about twenty minutes.
Make it an hour, I wish I could,
for there's so much to breathe in,
before I see the bills.

There's the stirring breeze of dusk,
the death of all the churning
or cutting engines of day:
of chain saws and lawn mowers,
tractors and boat engines,
Halley bikes and roaring cars.

There's the sunlight
that penetrates through the clouds
leaving them with celestial streaks
on their downside;
that penetrates the canopies,
and taints the leaves of spring
with golden hues

three Canadian geese home
at their usual hour,
their hollow calls circling
above the lake;
and the evening birds, each to its perch,
defends it's territory,
as it's beak assaults the air
with an endless song,

and for me it's the song
of the tires that turn on the gravel road,
the hum of the engine,
the nostalgic strains of jazz

from the car radio –
that stirs my mind into a trance-like travel,

the long-forgotten places
I would gladly revisit,
and the silhouettes of love songs
that are now but echoes
of a youth that was once carefree
and golden.

Chi

Spring Rain Sauna

The evening settles in
with a warm spring drizzle
that washes through the skies,
the trees and the earth.

There's nowhere than the gravel road,
for the toads from the nearby lake
to bask under the warm rainy weather,
to show their thin-skin coats,
engage intimate romance
so at the tail end of the day,
they can satiate a season's urge.

And so the males leap
out of the pond's undergrowth,
onto the warm gravel road,
their hairy ampits itching for rain salt
as they look for mounted areas
to ensconce themselves
for the spring suana...

Approaching headlamps
from another world flash into their eyes,
SUVs that speed like
blind monsters which won't slow down
their own itching rage till they
gasp at their journey's end.

But the toads sit tight and indifferent -
they would rather stare at the oncomers
with disdainfully bulging eyes.
And even so, the thralls
of the warm evening shower
is too great to make them bulge.

They will not respond when I skirt
through their lot, keeping them
underneath the car,
between the wheels as I go past.

They are blind to dying:
and except for the snake,
the eternal enemy, nothing shakes them
in the image of death.

Not particularly when they are caught
in the heat of spring's passionate carousals,
when the steamy lakeside rain
opens up their skin pores

for them to refill the winter's hunger
this time - in self abandon -
with a frothing palate of heavenly juices.

Chi

Spring Songs

On the dirt road along the pond,
Several spring songs lay squashed
As I went to work yesterday.

I had tried to chase them
back into the pond
as I drove home two nights ago.

I tried to chase them
back into the pond
as I drove home yesterday.

But I'm not sure they understood.

'Why's he bothering us? ',
they must have thought.

'Did you see them as you drove
home last night ', I asked my partner.
'No, I didn't', she answered.

They were right there on the road,
like little chiefs, night-basking.
I had slowed down and skirted them.
Then came out of the car and tried
to send them back into the pond.

My partner must have been listening
to the radio as she drove home.
And my neighbors are too busy to see
other road users as they think of sweet home.

On the dirt road along the pond,
spring songs lie squashed
every morning I return to the farm house.

Chi

State Tensions

Half-human, half-post industrial, she has lost all sensations of empathy.
in-consciously blunted by the pressures of the economic machine,
Some would die for profit as some for a little life.

Even in giving to a relation, is an un-calculated purpose:
the family is as much a tool for exterior definition
As of interior exploitation:

the mother refuses the son,
newly admitted into college, of leaving the home:

'You can't leave me with your 'father': I can't face him alone! '

The son, used to never letting 'it' get to him,
takes it hard, and swears quietly at the mother.

'Some day.... Some day...' he slows at the red lights, eyes starring blindly
down Vestal Parkway.

The evening shift at World Mart only hardens his silence.

Chi

The Weight Of Fogs

It halts at the harbor,
and stares at the ships in the distance,
unmoved by the foghorn.

Often, when there are no ships
to watch,
it yawns at the empty sea,

then drifts down to the beach
like a little puppy
exploring its world.

Today it saw a little child's rusted toy
in the dunes,
and drew closer for a look.

It bent over the age-old thing,
stretched out its pseudopodic hands
to pick it up,
and take it along.

But then it occurred to it,
as if in hindsight,
that fogs have no weight.

It simply sighed,
gathered its veils,
and drifted away above the sea.

Chi

Trans-Actions

"At 90, my son, you'd definitely own
a store like this", the twisted,
back-bent old man, leaning on a cane stick
stammered to the young skull-cap clad manager-assistant.

His eyes made a circle round the perimeter of the store,
following the edge
of his cane stick, which came back to rest
on the floor where he stood.

I began to chuckle,
then burst out into quiet laughter.

"Won't that be good? " the assistant said,
concluding the return by handing over to the old man his new receipt.

"Thank you, my son. I appreciate your effort", he said,
commending the young man's uncanny explanation.

I watched him slowly leave the store, chuckling to himself,
his extended Adam's apple shaking
as he took all the time in the world
to walk out of the vestibule.

The managing assistant finished signing the return slips,
asked me to counter-sign, then closed the register,
and left to attend - as usual -
to the fixtures on the store floor.

I wasn't sure I would be seeing the old man in the store
following the coming winter.

Chi

Two Found Poems: The Floral Artist & The 'strelitzia Reginae'

1 - The Floral Artist□

'A stocky figure with elephantine limbs,
(not Picasso's fleshy paintings)
a head like a large, flat Dutch cheese,

thick lips; a hollow voice;
crooked fingers; a repellent appearance;

yet beneath the surface...

The most celebrated flower painter of his day,
the most popular indeed

in the whole history of botanical art'

2 - 'the Strelitzia Reginae'

'From a perennial stringy root
shoot forth a considerable number of leaves,

standing upright on long footstalks,
from a sheath of someone of which,
near its base,

springs the flowering stem,
arising somewhat higher than the leaves,
and terminating in an almost horizontal
long-pointed spatha,

containing about six or eight flowers,

which becoming vertical as they spring forth,
from a kind of crest,

which the glowing orange of the Corolla,
and fine azure of the Nectary,
renders truly superb'.

Chi

Well Come To World Mart!

take it easy:
don't let it get to you.

you'd lose your mind
and your job
if you do.

Chi

Wildlife Internship: Found Poem

Interning at the Sanctuary provides a great opportunity to gain valuable experience in working with wildlife, natural resources, and environmental education.

Accommodations are rustic dormitory living with no running water, electricity, or telephone. There is a Laundromat in town and showers are available at a nearby campground. Unfortunately, daily showers are not possible - so please be prepared.

You will be able to wash up between showers, using a plastic basin and your own soap, washcloth, and towel. You will be expected to be clean and neat when it is time to meet the public. Please remember that the sanctuary is located in a remote area with limited transportation available. Bike riding on the Sanctuary is prohibited due to heavy bear activity.

You will have virtually no living expenses as your food and housing are provided by the organization.

Interns will help to educate the public during open hours, 5.00pm to dusk every day... This includes, but is not limited to, greeting visitors, pointing out and explaining bear activity, giving interpretive talks on bear ecology and behavior, and answering visitors' questions about bears.

Other tasks during the day will include preparing bear food mixes, helping to put out food, assisting with general cleanup chores, including scooping of bear scat, participating in habitat improvement projects, and maintaining records on bear activity.

Heavy lifting will be required: truckloads of supplies such as 100 pound bags of corn, 50 pound bags of seed,

and boxes of fruit and nuts weighing 30-35 pounds are delivered regularly.

The intern's day will average 9-10 hours, comprised of a day shift of 4-5 hours and the evening visitors' time, which is 5 hours.

In addition to the above...

Chi

Writing Against Dying...

This futile servitude,
web-enhanced -
keying thoughts,
rest-less-ly:
'I write, so I am'

or to mummify self now
and when the leaves
of future days turn.

Call it hubris,
'My name's Ozymandias! '

Chi