FORTUNES
FIT
poems by
Kendra Preston Leonard
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Kendra Preston Leonard
Humble, Texas, March 2020
Rewriting *King Lear* in a Time of Pandemic

I
Your sweet heart
keep from whirlwinds.
Engrail it with caregiving
as above
the rollicking lark
oversails your walk.

By doing charity,
vex the fiends.
Bring cakes and garlic,
dovetail vigilance
with valor.

II
You who maverick at this time,
keep your foot out of the webs
spun on the road and windows,
and punish no homes but your own.
Entreat your old to stay,
and need not even five yourself.

Shut up your doors and there
flourish wild within: lick bear-cubs into bears,
fool and make content and bide the pitiless storm
with porridge and warm blanket,
with singing wolf and purring fox and sleeping dog,
with tadpoles in the ditch and green mantle
to see when cock crows at last.

III
We should grace our kin with ink,
and our deliverers with chalk,  
and write a thousand notes on the concrete.  
Play at the clavier and trumpet,  
long silent and corked with dust;  
savor gin and vodka, nettles and chives,  
make puppets from socks and  
stroll the decks of our homes,  
run with the happy dogs in opulent sun,  
and abide, shielded from the diseases of the world.

IV
The elk before the mountain,  
the mountain cloaked and cradling,  
the cradle carved from olive.

Viking, devil, virago,  
void, alcove, cage,  
grind, crave, veil.

The kids along the river,  
the river rinked with ice,  
ice calved from far away.

Dove, vole, rover,  
voice, lake, rival,  
dive, lock, cave.

The grove in a ring,  
the ring laced with grackles,  
the grackles croaking, racing.

Clerk, girl, crone,  
coven, vigor, glover,  
care, roil, live.
V
Guard with vigilance: preserve
the hedge and sky and hills,
the beasts and trees and winds,
and with the sprig of rosemary,
remember, escape, attend.
Kale and Kudzu

The sun bear
does not know;
the cranes
in their mating dance
do not care

rose farms overgrow,
kale and kudzu make soft sarcophagi
for trucks and skeleton cows;

a hat hangs in the sun,
a curtain sways.

In the olive grove, a single leaf
becomes sunset.
How to Use a Labyrinth

Begin with stopping.

Clear your mind of:
David Bowie,
masquerades,
dancing,
and goblins.

Interrogate the ground:
is it meant for
slow walking?
Can it be followed
without requiring walking?
Can it be entered
and exited
with wheels, sticks, guides?

Is it dirt? Is it full of
fancy yogis? Are there
bees? The susurrus of
distant trees? Grasses
that invite
touch
without stinging?

(Are there ticks?)

Is there a scent?
Is it lovely, real lavender
in the heat of the sun,
faint but present,
nostalgic?
Or is it that lady,
over there with the hat,
is it her perfume?

Are there candles, to
set my clothes on fire?
Is it slippery?

Is it tiny, on a table,
meant for
steady fingers? Does it require
dexterity?
(Now you may think of David Bowie
and his dexterity with the silver ball.)

Clear your mind again. Ask:
who is this labyrinth for?
Isolation and Old Observance

Mind your fire at home,
so come May it will burn in the fields.
Watch for the dawn through the window,
as the Bede searched for her in his books.
Make three joyful leaps alone,
to have dancing together this summer.
Apart on the land, feed the hares their crops,
apples in sun on the cross-quarter day.
Ossuary Garden

under artfully arranged brambles bodies
each creates cathedrals of ribs where
the grubs may take communion,
where each offers vertebral apartments
for beetles, side by side by side,
or feeds the ever-growing rosebush

beneath, tunneling, building, knocking down
like the sea to sandcastles the once-cat
feeding the ever-growing rosebush

gone-hound enriching the violets and weeds
feeding the ever-growing rosebush
Witchcraft for Cellists

I To Protect Your Hands and Instrument (especially during travel)

Burn a copy of Popper’s exudes. Strike a match using your left hand and light the bottom right corner of the book. As it burns, sing your favorite etude. When it is fully burned, rake your hands through the ashes. With ashes still on your fingertips, touch each string of your instrument, smudging your bridge.

II To Support Right Hand Technique at Auditions

Pluck a hair from your bow and immerse in a mixture of lemon juice, an heirloom tomato, sea salt, and a macerated peony. Chop very finely and sprinkle onto pasta and eat.

III To Ensure Strong Fingers and Calluses for Six Months

With an athame or clean paring knife, cut the fingertips of your left hand during a rainstorm. Make short, straight cuts. Coat and old string with your blood. Wind the string into a circle and tie with twine. When the rain has been gone three days, place the string in your case.

IV To Aid in Playing the Dvorak Concerto
Sit under a tree.
Plunge your hands into bowls full of
fresh-cut grass and glass beads.
Relax.

V To Aid in Playing the Barber Concerto

Locate Capricorn in the night sky.
Beneath it, make a sacrifice
of Italian wine
to a yew tree.

VI To Play Artificial Harmonics with Greater Clarity

Submerge your whole body in salty seawater.
Dry in natural light and follow
with a glass of champagne.

VII For Building Equity

Build an altar of
Bach’s cello suites,
Beethoven’s sonatas for piano and cello and cello and
piano,
Brahms’s sonatas for cello and piano,
and a candle.
Light the candle at sundown
and play only works by women and non-binary
composers
until the candle is half burnt.
Those with whom you come into contact
in the next 24 hours
will experience new desires
for radical diversity and inclusion
in their future concerts.

VIII To Learn New Music More Quickly

Sing a lullaby to your cello after practicing new pieces.
Keep your voice gentle and soft.
Wait until your cello has gone to sleep
to stop singing.

IX To Prevent Believing in Musical Curses

Collect all of the ninth symphonies,
the ninth sonatas,
collect, quickly,
all of the ninths,
ninth by name or time,
quickly, make haste, collect them.
Make stacks, make heaps,
let them make waterfalls of scores,
each falling from the other,
each falling to the last.
Quickly, quickly,
now stack them with photographs
and drawings
of their composers.
Put on a recording
of Lili Boulanger’s
“Pour les Funérailles,”
sprinkle them with pepper,
sing a line of nine pitches,
and dance a dance nine minutes long.
Strawberry Man

The Strawberry Man
and his little pinto pony—
sweetness, slaked
in the city street
**Spirochete**

Spiral, twist, curl,
a long lazy shape:
the little river, the stone-filled creek,
the flight of the tick
and the shape of the microbe
acquired the day of planting trees—
here now is delirium,
feverous nights.

Entangling, hiding,
in disguise like a carnival queen;
my escort, it takes my hand,
keeping me
out of the sun
far from my woods,
mortal coil, coiled.
The Dog on the Roof

They have an agreement
my dog and he:
he stays on the roof of his house
away from the fence;
she dispenses with
trying to eat him.

He remains,
keeping away
burglar ghosts
and the cruelty of
blue jays.

There he is:
the nine-thirty bark,
the ten at night;
the seven a.m.,
from the roof,
watchman of the clock
that runs his stomach.
What Will They Write?

If I die right now, will people write about me?
What about now?

Or now?

Will they write lies about me?
Will they write in-depth deep dives into my words and ethos and life?
What biographical details will they fixate on?

What will escape them? What will escape being written about?

What should I write about, if people might write about me?
How close should I keep my secrets?
How will I be judged for ambition, -isms, deciding to use a hard return just here?

Will they call me gorgon? Late riser?
What will they read in my callused fingertips and the words I make with them?

Will they write about my tattoos, my scars, the unseen self-maiming laser that is my mind?

What if I die twenty years from now?
Will people write about this poem?
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