

Norah Bowman-Broz

Hunter-Gatherer: Five Exchanges

One: Syrup

One kilogram of honey
is the first gift.

I say
I will make good things with this honey.

I am sure you will,
he says.

We stand over the sink pitting cherries.
He slides a chopstick through the stem end.
The stone twists out.
Our hands redden blacken.

I switch to peaches.
I pare an X in the smooth bottom of each fruit.
He pours the boiling water,
careful not to splash me as I watch.
I slide the skin from each fruit.
I feed him a pieced skinless peach.

I have never been fed a peach by hand before,
he says.

How is it?
I ask.

In *Twelve Roses: A Cookbook for Healthful Living*,
I read about honey syrups for canning fruit.
I preserve twelve jars of huckleberries
sixteen jars of peaches
sixteen jars of cherries
and three jars of blackberries
in honey syrup.

In the Winter, I pretend to be joking when I say this, *I will send you a box of this fruit.*

Then, though you will have forgotten about our summer love, you can eat the sweetness.

I will not forget you, he says, not joking.

I know, I say.

Two: Berries

I search the sheets every morning for his hairs.
Each one is a new shade of copper and strawberry, a variation on
long curl.

This room has so many smells.
Sometimes, while I sit sewing beads onto felt, I smell sandalwood or
shit or diesel.

Sometimes even lavender or sage or sweat.
Ghosts, the Persian prophet Abdul'Baha writes,
often manifest themselves through a scent of unidentifiable origin.
Jasmine flowers on the deck of a sailboat in the Pacific.
Seaweed on the hot sidewalk of a prairie city.

One woman here tells a joke about berries:
I don't like the *hwooshum*
so I chuck'em
because I really like the *chuk'em*.

Bitter *Hwooshum* are a valuable trade berry.
Once the berry skins are broken and the pulp is whipped with a
splayed stick the froth rises above the basket.
A kind of sea foam tinged with the desert berry's pink.

Our trade is one kilogram of creamed Canadian honey for
a paper grocery bag of sage sticks still damp from the grasslands.
One bowl of millet with blackberries and almonds for
two sets of oak chopsticks.
A minor scale in three variations for
the lyrics to *May the Circle be Unbroken*.

Trade is never fair.
Currency, by way of fluctuating drafts,
the weather of our desire.

Poverty is a mindset we,
this bright summer, my darling,

Norah Bowman-Broz

cannot afford.

Three: Shell

“Hunters thus not only live without a sense of future, they do not produce a real future, that is, a future with the potential to be anything but a continuation of the present instant. This is a temporal mode of determination with a dialectical vengeance, since it undermines the evolutionary temporality that is part of its motivational sources.⁴”

This green glass bead slides along a black thread from the needle.

There is a box of crushed oyster shells at the post office.

Distance across water is difficult to judge.

Distance across moons suns fireworks is not a chromatic scale.

I only have one appetite at a time.

*You have a way with words.
I have always had long-distance relationships.*

Yes.

They are difficult.

Yes.

Round holes at the centre of a Pacific Clam shell indicate a predator.
That predator is the Moon Snail.

At low tide, the Moon Snail drills a hole in the immobile clam and
draws out the
living flesh with a powerful pale vacuum.

Don't tell me the Moon Snail has no motivational source.
Don't tell me the Pacific Clam does not lament a draining
future.

When will I stop polishing the phone with this pathetic ear?
I hear the last jar seal just before you don't call again.

⁴ (Harvey A. Feit, “The Enduring Pursuit: Land, Time, and Social Relationships in Anthropological Models of Hunter-Gatherers and in Subarctic Hunters’ Images.” 426)

Four: Apple

We walk to town to buy spark plugs.
He dances away from the chemicals
leaking off the shelves.
Moves his head slowly in front of flashlights, coils of rope.
I finger green electrical tape, dowelling rods, bicycle tires.

“Hunter-gatherers, certainly, function in a circular, seasonal
temporal reality, less marked by predicted and manipulated
events than by intuited seasonal change.” (Feit 16)

Between Canadian Tire and Highway Seven he finds, he feeds me
red plums
soft summer chestnuts
runner peas
lemon thyme. Most daring, the
red apples fallen across a triangle of
lawn. His strong body a tossed leash, he passes through
aluminum link and palms me
the smallest brightest fruit