

Andrea Nicki

My Prayer

My prayer is for self-sickness, a sickness when the self
gets lost in a big sea of itself and can't find anyone and or anything to hang onto.
Even a log is too difficult to grasp, resists any pull, springs to another log as if for protection.
A dolphin veers in another direction as if facing a shark,
and even a shark is uninterested, finds such prey unappetizing as an empty shell.
A whale will avert this lone human just as it does a killer orca.
A human afflicted with self-sickness may lose interest in water,
confuse something so essential with alcohol and have no limit.
Food too may become tasteless, adding flesh and reminders of humanity, other humans.
Others may offer help, but the human has collapsed too far into themself,
become a compressed, stuck accordion--no music possible--
or like a closed fan, refusing to cool even for a moment another's sweating brow.
Others lose interest in helping them, in trying to connect, in seeing potential--
avoid this stinging jellyfish.

Family History

Is parental neglect just “water under the bridge”?
The water seems rocky under a black night sky and a sad woman
is considering whether she should jump,
but then decides to walk down the gravel path
and look at the river.
It is calm enough, with a small breeze,
and the water close by is shallow.

There is someone standing above her,
her older sister.
Her anorexic body and clothing make her look like she is still 16.
She is looking beyond the river,
proud and confident, but angry.

The brothers do not know where to stand,
next to which sister, the younger or the older:
the one skidding stones across the water
near the river’s mouth, its tongue tip,
unconcerned, tranquil
or the older one who is upset,
throwing stones at everyone, including the younger one,
but missing.

Seeing Double

I am jetlagged from flying across 16 time zones, back to Vancouver from Southern Taiwan, my body still vibrating after 48 hours, seeing double:

smoky air, shrouding hills, human moods versus Granville Island air scented with essential oils from its tourist shops, boutiques perfuming and enlivening people and dogs;

my brother's dogs walking freely up a high mountain in Chun Rih, at times spotting and picking up dried worms, like a long chain of dried raisins, and spiraling down and around the mango farms, then meeting several more dogs barking and growling near the top, defending a farm

versus short-leashed Vancouver dogs in pink duffel jackets and studded leather collars, some collars flashing with red lights, greeting each other with a wag and sniff, trotting past well-manicured lawns and town houses, playing "fetch" in muddy, fenced dog parks;

Ping Tung County owners knowing their neighbours' names, though not always their neighbours' dogs' and community dogs' names

versus Vancouver owners often knowing only their neighbours' dogs' names or, if they have forgotten, asking and about the breed;

Mountain Indigenous people of Chun Rih of four generations mingling with white Europeans as friends, fathers, mothers, husbands, wives, in-laws, uncles, aunts, co-workers, teachers...

versus Indigenous people of disrupted generations--the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh nations--at rallies protesting the invasion of pipelines into their unceded, ancestral lands and missing, murdered Indigenous women;

7-11 coffee versus Starbucks;

a squatting toilet versus a seated toilet;

toilets in omni-present 7-11 stores versus toilets in sporadic coffee shops.

a bowl of sesame noodles with pickled boiled egg and seaweed versus fish and chips;

betel nut versus cannabis;

outside betel nut stalls versus federally legal cannabis stores with student and new immigrant employees;

network of teachers minding each other's children versus individualistic teachers competing for spots in daycare or with paid help;

my brother's close teacher friend who treats me as a sister, shares his loves of the land, slips a betel nut chew into my pocket, saying "Welcome to Taiwan";

versus Vancouver colleagues who are in other townships or "too busy" to come greet me when I return at the airport, my eyes looking hopefully for my name in English print on cardboard alongside cardboard with names in Chinese script;

my sister-in-law's great aunt, Paiwanese elder, next door who has never left the village because "there is no reason to" versus my Canadian aunt in a care center with sons and relatives at the opposite side of the country;

exteriors of houses with one coat of paint, the original, versus yearly new layers of paint;

a lot of questions about family and personal life versus a lot of questions about work and status;

one personality matching business, work, family, friends, and community versus a manicured, rotating personality with different sides, depending on the setting and situation;

shirts matching others' shirts--my brother donning a Paiwanese vest for a concert at the Paiwanese school where he teaches--versus matching brand name business suits;

my supersize body in Taiwan that can't find an attractive swimsuit in store after store at the night market versus my medium-sized body safely tucked and hidden among plus sizes;

Tonight I took my dog for a night walk around Granville Island. Trying to recover from the dehydration of air flight, I had drunk a lot of water. I needed to pee but the community center was closed and none of the coffee shops and restaurants would let me use the restroom with my dog; I squatted in a dark, bushy spot of the dog park.