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Two poems for Miscellany

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Birdwatching for Beginners: an incomplete quiz

1. If two great egrets appear in a pond by a highway in northern Ontario in June and the observer is in the passenger seat of a car driving at 120 km/hour, how quickly will expert birders tell her she didn't see the egrets?
 - a) within twenty minutes of posting on Facebook
 - b) within two minutes on iNaturalist
 - c) pics or it didn't happen
 - d) how is this a question

2. The best way to distinguish between a soaring hawk and an ambitious crow is:
 - a) flight pattern
 - b) plumage
 - c) size
 - d) bird poems are so 1988

3. When you spot two rabbits in the morning, do you interpret this as a sign for:
 - a) warm weather
 - b) fecundity
 - c) clear and present danger
 - d) the inability of the quiz compiler to focus on birds

4. When your elderly neighbour welcomes you to the neighbourhood and says "be careful of the . . ." and then can't remember the name of the animal but he describes it, do you:
 - a) assume he means a raccoon
 - b) prepare for the animal apocalypse
 - c) be immediately distracted by a loathsome fantasy in which you lift the garbage can lid to find a hissing and possibly fainting possum
 - d) be immediately distracted by a lovely fantasy in which you lift the garbage can lid to find a hissing and possibly fainting possum

5. Your photographer friend sees a heron standing in a pond and wants a photo of the bird with its wings spread. He asks you to toss a stick to startle the heron. Do you:
 - a) choose a stick carefully and aim to miss
 - b) tell him to toss his own damn stick
 - c) throw a stick at the photographer to see if he startles
 - d) slowly raise one leg and stretch your neck forward

6. When you see a falcon's nest atop a light standard that is viewable from your mother's hospital room, do you:
 - a) get her into a wheelchair and take her to the window to look
 - b) believe her when she says she can see the nest from where she is in the bed
 - c) sit in the Memory Garden on the 10th of the 16 days of her dying and listen to the young falcons peeping in their high voices
 - d) why are you even thinking of birds—you are the worst

7. When you spot a three-legged dog at any time during your day, do you:
 - a) interpret it as a sign that you'll see two rabbits the next morning
 - b) reject the sight as inspo porn
 - c) pursue it for a selfie
 - d) remember a joke about a three-legged dog named Tripod and wonder if that was the whole joke or if there was more to it

8. When you say that you are writing poems about how disconnected you feel from the natural world, and how bad were those years when you thought you would die and how the only thing that saved you each day was a walk by the creek, and the other writer snorts "That's a cliché," do you:
 - a) say nothing
 - b) say "Saying *that's a cliché* is a cliché!"

- c) listen to a tinny version of your own voice in your head yelling “walk away!”
- d) walk away

9. When next you see a bird, you think:

- a) there’s a bird
- b) there’s a poem
- c) there
- d) *

Birch Goddess

This three-inch-high goddess

carved from birch

has no eyes but her stare

could drop an ox. The birch is

back and she's

the business. She's top branch.

*

In Iceland, two rocks face each other

across a stream: two nuns

burned at the stake for indecency.

No more details.

This village was haunted by a dead girl

until a priest pushed

her ghost into a boiling hot spring.

Too much detail.

*

The birch goddess fronts a bare-breast

band. She'll fry your cod and
make you beg. She cocks

a hip and hoops you, she rustles
your corns. She cools your
jets. She froths

your milk with two dark
nipples. She's of a piece.
She's wood and she would.

Throw her overboard and she'll
found a city. Geography is
no cure but chug it anyway.

*

Glacier atop a volcano:
ash and dirty ice,
she bakes a layer cake.

The birch mother is steamed.
She's rift, she's black sand,
she's a river outburst.

*

Reading Patricia Highsmith

in Iceland is

a recipe for disaster.

*

In Valhalla, the same

pig is eaten

every night at the warriors'

feast, then is born again,

to be killed and eaten

again.

*

In Canada, we call this

existential dread.

In Iceland, it is abundance.

*

In Iceland, sheep are independent

as contractors

and delicious roasted with birch leaves.

In Iceland, three trees make

a forest. Aspen no questions.

Rowan no lies.

TANIS MACDONALD is the author of six books, including *Mobile: poems* (Book*hug, 2019). Her recent works have appeared in *Prairie Fire*, *Minola Review*, and *Understorey*. She lives in the Grand River Watershed as a guest on the traditional territories of the Anishnaabe, Attawandaron, and Haudenosaunee peoples, and is a professor at Wilfrid Laurier University.