

Señákw

by Susan Alexander

Three-kite man dazzles the afternoon sky:
thrust and zoom, synchronized twirl.
A slow bicycle booms out “Angel of the Morning.”
Kites as angels, as warriors, as flags,
as long-tailed birds, red and blue and white,
theatrical as pennants of the tents further off.

Three-kite man pulls strings, and we watch
his sails lift and kiss, then loop in all directions
like calligraphy, figure skaters, sea creatures.
*They'll be no strings to bind your hands
if my love can't bind your heart.*
Scene complete, the master drags air to earth.

Obedient kites land in line, upright and quiet.
Spectators clap while yachts motor by.
Parades of joggers and dogs. Picnickers,
Seigel's bagels loaded with smoked meat or lox,
look for spots unsullied by Canada geese.
What year did the Bard disperse its queues?

Aristophanes understood the power of withholding.
Lysistrata has lovers and generals falling like dominos.
The actors step out of character to talk of Señákw:
the land under our settler feet, of families marched
to a barge in 1913, and set adrift, a captive
audience forced to watch their village torched.

In the gap, the sky turns mauve above transplanted maples.
Ice cream treats are failsafe, upwind from the Jiffy Johns.
Women were licentious and weak to Ancient Greeks.
Just touch my cheek before you leave me, baby.
Lysistrata reframes a tale, takes a stand
to stop her city's war with the weapons she has.

It's a mercy a tug spotted the castaways and towed
the village barge across the Narrows to their neighbours.
What is the thing that binds the heart? Vancouver
city fathers didn't need to fly a kite to test
citizen opinion on pillaged land. Even when they do,
someone is always holding the strings.