

how do we hold silence

how do we hold silence
in lines of poetry, in the syntax
of the poem's phrases or sentences?

and, why does it matter anyway?
is there not more power
in the words we write,

in words we say to each other?
touched our being, lifted, soars.
nisimis, I say in relationship, *cry*.

there is no shame in loss,
in a heart full of love —
our dad gone to the spirit world.

astam, let me hold you.
but not too tightly, you joke
but words can also hurt

leave us behind.
a freckle-faced young man on the bus
into Calgary, oozing the last call,

is initiating his travel companions
with Indian names for all to hear.
comes-too-quickly, I should laugh.

smashed-in-the-head, I cringe.
I wish I were somewhere else,
his travel companions trying to shush him.

taking a deep breath, I cover my face
with my shawl, beseech
sleep to come quickly

as antidote for the young man's transgression.
once spoken, words cannot be taken back.
sure, there is always the word, *sorry*.

(poem continues)

but listen to the sound
it makes, a pathetic overture
of could have — should have.

but silence left as space
between our words can hold
everything and more; it holds its own.

it becomes the measure
of the sacred space between us —
the uncertainty of our knowing

and there are no words for that.

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Cree words

nisimis — my younger sibling

astam — come here

deeper than bone

when they ask you
who are your people?
say...

they are the people
who live
 in the clearing where the rivers empty
 in the narrows of beaver river valley
 in haida gwaii
 at the foot of the three sisters

they are the people
who live
 along the bay of winipâkw
 along the river where bow reeds grow
 along the valley of the grande riviere
 on top of small mountain

they are the people
who live
 where two rivers come together
 where the people fish
 where the humpback salmon spawn
 near the lizard's domain

they are the people
who live
 by the waterfall place
 by the holy springs
 by the strait of the spirit
 in the place of peace

here on turtle's back—
on the land of the long white cloud—
home, down under in an endless time of dreaming—
the coming together, the falling apart
as it is today and forever.

for sale

thanks for the warning.
the rain of love to ease the coming down
from heights of snow-capped mountains,
soaring solitary eagle flights.

maybe it wasn't a good decision
to have a glass of wine
with my tortilla soup after all;
but I wanted to extend the glow.

the orgy of poetry and mountain air.
recount the gems I collected along the way.
enjambment taking us to...
unknown territories.

the ghazel, couplet like
tips of trees rising
out of water. punctuation...
is punctuation. need I say more?

the servitude of emotion
for the poem and only the poem.
and, if the poem isn't working
begin with the last line.

words. just remember
every single last one
is important. turn each one
over and over again.

kill the darlings!
erase your footsteps!
get out of the poem!
listen deeply, be still —

dadirri, I whisper to myself.
when the call of a gate change
for passengers heading to Saskatoon
reminds me I am at the Calgary airport.

(poem continues)

I rise slowly taking the last sip,
head to gate 50, my brown leather-bound
notebook clutched closer to the heart,
the next moment unclear

when I suddenly find myself
sobbing at the site
of authentic Indigenous goods
for sale, recalling:

every word counts.
it's *The Trading Post*, Rita,
get a fucking grip on yourself
people are watching you

fall apart, unravel
the mystery of your circumstance.
a pretty mukluded brown faced
doll dream catching,

amidst an abundance of
real stones, gems and turquoise,
moose jerky and token animals
is not the real thing.

the new-aged sounds of nature,
the ancient drum songs
on a hard pressed disc,
near a reel Indian

head-dressed next to the Inushuk
are made in China,
for God's sake.
take flight and just remember:

what is not for sale.

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words

dadirri — Australian concept for “a deep listening” and the contemplation that is in tune with the seasons, etc.