

FORTUNE COOKIE POEMS

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POEMS

STEPHANIE MIROCHA

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INTRODUCTION

STEPHANIE MIROCHA

Each poem in this collection was inspired upon opening a fortune cookie and finding a saying inside that spoke to my heart. In each case, a fortune cookie saying emerged from the cookie inspiring a poem that emerged from me.

Each poem is prefaced with the fortune cookie saying in italics.

The sun is always shining somewhere.

#1 TAKE THE PHOTO

Inside your dark abyss
cloaked in the infinite
self-absorbed deep
envelope of invisibility
your head is licked shut.

But you can press the shutter release
black hole
exploding
on a light beam
into a million
unzipped droplets
slipping solipsism out.

The sun
dawns
granular at first
as your image slowly develops.
Sandy edges
form and fix
fully focused shaken further
stark and shining
into being.

The inner eye blinks.
The tripped switch winks

open
one
breath
at a time.

*You are strong and brave.
Use these qualities to pull through.*

#2 CHANGE

My blood courses round
the racetrack
hormones pushing
farther
faster
until fat
rises to the top of hot flesh cooling
congealing
fallen tears
out of nowhere
from this fish fillet,
my body.
It matters that
you played my song request
throwing me down onto softness
with your hard driving music.
But I must navigate these icy curves
alone
traveling every which way
my thoughts
slipping wetly
round and round
the roundabout.
Out of my heart
the gibbous moon
pulls a flower waxing
until I forget,
then replants it
again upon waning
weakening my aim.
There it goes again –
the blood
surging just beyond my reach –
flushed with fresh chemistry,
not a correction
only a change,
auto-prescribed and unlabeled
plunging through me.

*When you are in love the sun is shining
from both inside and outside.*

#3 SUNBURST

A fortune cookie saying
comes true
with you.

When a simple word

rain

and a verb

drips
drops

transforms into a blossom
opening to the sky,
that is love
and being loved in return.

My heart yearns
to plunge blindly
into morning glory pools
while sunbursts
roll softly across tree limbed hills
pulsing
madly to the horizon.

Encourage me and I will not forget you.

#4 ONE MOMENT, PLEASE

Passing voices blend
legs swish across the street
and heels pop
laughter crossing
snatches of shared lunch
chats
and rising echoes
roll
cut and join
across my plate.
But one moment, please,
beyond all that familiar
from inside
one word spoken in
your sweet voice
might inject a ray of sunshine down
sparkling
into my heart.

Courage comes through suffering.

#5 COURAGE

Has stood by me these many years.

Is that courage I see lurking now
inside of me –
a gutless, spineless
moray eel
poking its head out?

Surely, by now I merit a look
at its entire body
exposed to danger.
Let me see you!
Slip out now, all the way
from layer upon layer
of coral reef hidey holes
I've built and rebuilt
over a lifetime.

Courage unsheathed
shows itself
with a little smile,
skin greenish-tinged,
then darts back to safety.

*Do not demand for someone's
soul if you already got his heart.*

#6 DO NOT DEMAND

Of course —
heart is not enough.
It never is.
But you will get nowhere by asking
and absolutely lost in demanding.

Give instead.
Openly and with no expectations
give and give
and give
until you feel
your souls join helplessly laughing
at the vagaries
of loving hearts.

*Change your thoughts and
you change your destiny.*

#7 KOAN IMAGE

Monday morning
whip up the up ramp from early morning darkness.
See the same image
every day passing by.
Glance to the right
out empty passenger window,
and greet
industrial building lights
glaring in
swaths of unflinching symmetry
glowering over the pond.
Daily,
I'm seeing and not seeing –
moving up into commuter commotion.
Today I really look,
floating retinal
headlights both inside and out of my body,
aware of
slow motion ducks out there
swimming through reflected stripes
of white lights and luscious dark sinking.

How many times have I passed here unaware?

Tuesday
Wednesday
Thursday
the same.
My eyes
catch the scene for one second
before moving up into traffic flow.

Friday,
round up the bend.
Steal one last look before weekend,
slapped awake into sparkling
headlights merging
soft shapes of waterfowl diving –
a koan image projection to ponder on while driving.

Their duck wings cut through water walls.

Mine plumb brain wave depths,
my newly dipped and formed fingerlings
tunneling neuron pathways
reaching dendrite routes down
deeply into pockets
to explore mindfully along the seams
for food for thought
with only a sense of touch guiding the way.

Dredge a dream
slowly awake.
Gasp for breath.
Grasp and pull in hope,
flopped up with scales gleaming,
sides heaving.
Draw out an idea,
a card to play,
a dime to turn a life upon,
and you will change
jingling
with every movement forward.

I learn by going where I have to go.

#8 SOMETIMES THE VEIL IS THIN

Often on my journey
I am waiting
to catch up with myself
stuck in an equation with time
unequal to the experience.

My head lifts
now and then
to see where I'm going,
reminded that
the blue sky is
only a façade dropped back at night
to reveal where the stars are shining
always
in a bigger picture.

A song can pull that curtain back.

A voice with unseen face
calls out
across the universe
reminding me of who I am.

Floating backwards
on a snippet of melody
memory snags
tasting of wine, lights and clean up afterwards
pasted to the shadows
on the floor in the morning
hurriedly packing up my paintings.

Sunshine pings off Spanish tiled roofs.
Two men wait to drive me
from the gallery to the airport
everything on a schedule –
another show coming in –
lounging neutrally, casually watching
as I crouch there zipping it all back up
into a moment
I had no idea
would one day
send me all the way back

through the autumn air
and across the ocean
as lyrics fly out
and up
and up
on the wind.

“It’s time to leave.”

Begin...the rest is easy.

#9 BEGIN

Gaze upon
crinkling starburst
heat swoosh of
dust package
each thing alone amongst each other
filling a crevasse of emptiness.

The mountain is a sleeping
volcano of trinkets
rumbling letters
and notes
revisiting happy words
and reminders
reminders
lists
associations
fading into time
connections lost on a map
to the past
belt hole filled
sandbag

pocket mound paper rising
red bag
blue purse
purple torn ragged
elastic band
jeans
no heel sock
settling.

Reach in.

Begin.

Clasp
pull
buckle through
and cinch loop.
Grasp
one item at a time.
Lean back and
prepare yourself to launch.
Release.

Float through hoop
free to fly
thrown
right along with
parachute seed fluff
rising
into blueness.

Objects form a line now
suspended in air
seeping shapes in the rainbow mist
drop
by
trickle drop
puffy at first
then becoming solid and
swinging dangerously
one behind the next
ready to click
waiting
until
fingertip trips
the trigger
joining everything
in unstoppable
eruption
lava river
round random bends
roller coaster tsunami waves
clearing the landscape
pulsing, cooling.

Breakthrough.

Rush in.
Float in.
Swing
dance
jump in.

Gaze upon
open path newly revealed.

Begin.

*Finish your works on hand. Don't
be greedy.*

#10 FINISH

I shall heed your blunt edged words.
They hurt a little, but strike home true
scraping out the rot.
Sometimes a sword is needed
to put things in order,
to slash through
delicate tendrils
extending their lace
into my field of vision.

Sheath the abstract thoughts
skipping laser beams
thing to thing
and try instead
parrying
delightfully
flower to flower
in the garden you have already begun.

Letting go,
I suddenly hold
the entire meadow
in a warm and summery
mural embrace.

*The fact that others are bad does
not imply that you are good.*

#11 BAD AND GOOD

And yet, how nice – and easy –
that would be!
To stay inside my good shell
and absorb myself,
slowly creating a world
of my own making,
which takes
constant feeding
and endless refolding
of flesh over soft flesh.

I think I will
stop resisting and
open up again
to let both good and bad
wash in and through me
in wave after benign wave
of the way things actually are
pulled in earth's natural motion.

For that is the only way
to free up otherwise wasted time,
the only chance to allow
one, pure and precious pearl —
hard and eternal —
to form from
the essential goodness
waiting within us all.

*Never does nature say one thing and
wisdom another.*

#12 MERRY-GO-ROUND

When you feel yourself
turning away from nature,
swing yourself right back onto her cycle
of seasons and changes
twirling in perpetual background orbits,
gravity spurred,
a merry-go-round
you'll spin your wheels trying to escape.
Our hearts on this ride
churn out wholesome heat
sending us soaring through
dizzying heights
while hoofbeats below
spark love and hate
and every magnitude in between.

Cinch the belly strap with a chuckle.
Pull up on and adjust the buckle.

The wheelhouse platform jerks and shifts.
Thoughts spill over in nervous tics
and tickles
down to stomach surging returning blood,
fear trickling along the slender pole
holding us up.

Grease from the doughnut vendor
wafts sweet and salty
shuffling crows
over for scraps.
Wind ruffles through leaves and hair
far above the big tent top
bolstering our columns of joyous laughter rising
through blue holes into the sky.

Over us
dazzling blankets of mirrors
arch melting rainbows
through organ song
piping us forward

collapsing forces into brief moments
of swirling revelry.

On each pass,
a lifetime of memories wave
from the perimeter
or sometimes swells forward,
even getting on to ride with you,
these remembered past actions
pulsing thoughts out in anguish
round and round
vying for attention
gasping in shame
deep into the body
where every sensory experience
binds us to every moment we are alive.
So, let them
for, in time, they will retreat back to their waving position.

Seat your horse.
It will carry you safely.
Trust in the wisdom of nature's design

and

ride the waves cresting up into aials.
You'll soon be coasting back down again
through offshore winds rushing surfside
before the next one grabs and locks on.

*It's amazing how much good you can do
if you don't care who gets the credit.*

#13 CREDIT

It's true.

My carefully scheduled credit,
past due,
doesn't matter much to you.

But if I clear the balance
carried to
and let love filter through

a domino effect unfolds
on cue,
touching hearts I never knew.

Each separate branch of kindness
from a few
reveals of a forest of trees that grew.

*If you judge people, you have no
time to love them.*

#14 OPEN YOUR HEART

Open your heart
else you will have no room to love
and no time to find the room.

For time is not the thing
that fills the sky with blue
nor does it extend that room eternally
backwards through the heart.

That kind of space only opens up
on setting aside measuring tools,
paint cans, decorating supplies
and other weapons
distracting attention away
from the better self
pining boxed and bound inside.

Upon surrendering,
a light switches on.
Walls shatter

baring shared flesh merging
your hand grasping mine
beneath the blood red orange of the setting sun.

Afterward, we walk,
a chill still occasionally crossing
between us on the snow cooled breeze
flitting fingers over skin.
Our boots crunch.
Rushing sounds of faraway cars
merge as trucks downshift into rumble mode.
In the quiet, stillness shivers.
And in the midst,
a woodpecker's sudden rat-a-tat tat
thunders us awake once more
aware of each other.

Together, we lift our eyes
as one to find reflected in our faces
simultaneous smiles opening
to the rising moon.

*Keep negative comments to yourself.
Avoid any disputes.*

#15 LET GO

Reverse air flows
from an almost popped balloon
I filled with angry exhalations.
It arcs with random flatulence
and flops back to earth.

I'm not yet ready
to conduct the dispute.
My iron will
clamps itself around my heart
dragging me earth bound.
Self-made chains
clang heavily with every step
away from rationality.

Just like you suggested,
I made my negative comments
into thought balloons.
Breathe in.
Breathe out.
Then let them go.

An inner voice says,
"It's long past due."

Years ago, I climbed
St. Anne's bell tower in Warsaw.
Taking in one last site before departure time
I stood overlooking Old Town,
feeling alone in that foreign city.
Cutoff.
Those sudden tears.
A hugely engorged
hot air balloon floated past
large as life above the river
just out of reach,
listing closer
but never close enough for me.
I longed to touch that field of yellow,
those stripes of blue, red and green
slowly drifting away on updraft currents

northwest around the bend
and disappearing beyond the trees.
Someone else's last
rainbow colored tourist opportunity.

Release a breath.
Breathe in again deeply.

Standing in those open air archways,
for one moment
my little light beamed
as now
unchanged.

You, my love,
my friend and closest ally
to whom I come home.
You are the one
at whom I lash out most —
and then
after
words
hissing
out
hot
remembering
once more
to let go the string.

Make sure to laugh everyday...it's good for your health.

#16 LAUGHTER

You faced the huge
alligator rising toward you.
Flinched
at the tail cracking
wump
exploding
across the water
in a million droplets
the snarling
rushing forward mouth parts
flashing
right at you
tingling fear
along your spine.

The way you put that
before finding
you were safe all along
watching from the board walk
makes me laugh.

Somehow, you and I always find a way.

My friend,
your rush of air
sweeps out through teeth
drawn back like mine
our lips dripping only smiles
in and out
two wading birds
feeding stories
side by side
dipping
dropping
our chortles
cascading through the air
onto half-submerged gator eyes
blinking harmlessly back up.

*Genius is more work than just
being a genius.*

#17 GENIUS

I know what it's not.

It's not folding laundry and hanging up the shirt
hot from the dryer before it wrinkles.

It's knowing when to stop the folding
for coming back to later
because the idea has taken you somewhere
else
now
because your brain has formed a tiny fold
putting two parts altogether differently
and promises more
and it just
can't
wait.

So you throw the rest of the laundry on the bed
(mostly socks and underwear at this point)
to follow the thought
wherever it leads.

Genius takes work
practicing the basics
relaxing into the zone.
It's taking many at bats
and actually
coming up with something

hitting deep,
over the fence,
looking up as it takes off,
and streaming sweat infused with joy.

The sun will rise again.

#18 BLACK AND LIGHT

Soak in deep the inky black
drawing inward sunlight's lack
'til dawn dissolves sleep into flight

black hole

pulling outward pulsing light.

“Good day! Good night!”
The same gate-keep
twice enfolds us
in his sweep.

Do what is right, not what you should.

#19 RIGHT SHOULD

What is right
is forged eternally
in rumbling volcanos
thrusting up molten spurts
of red liquid lava heart
teacher within.

Listen deep.

Rock.

Ultimately what is right
is the rock we should lean on.
So many “shoulds”!
Which should should it be?
Red shift out of the only light spectrum
visible to the human eye
into upper case
infrared
outside realms
of what we can see.

Dig deep.

Paper.

Norms learned over a lifetime
of high teas
imposed on screen porches
enclosing us in wicker chairs
overlooking the river
served
from higher authorities
only cloth napkins used here.

Look deep.

Scissors.

Become
the thought
clip out the shining habit
the compulsion to follow random breeze.

Thoughts wind chime
jingling distractions
through palm fronds
growing leafy fingers
spreading, hanging
only to dry and fall.

Cut deep.

Brush them away.
Let them lie on the road
or let them go.

Rock, Paper Scissors
your way
to look beneath your thoughts
until your fingers come up
burn tipped
caught red handed
in the magma
washing up to flush the face
in shame filled blush
at what you were hiding
from yourself
all along.

You will know.

What is right
is forged eternally
in rumbling volcanos
thrusting up molten spurts
of red liquid lava heart
teacher within.

*Discover what can gladden you
through and through.*

#20 WHILE WALKING

What could gladden me through and through?
The camping fee seemed much too high
for a quiet night's rest
and a hot shower.
But next morning
five ruffed grouse flushed
from the trail before me
all at the same time.

The sound of each one's sudden take off
exploded five shots
straight through my heart.

When I found my breath,
the need for counting
had disappeared
and I could not stop smiling.

*You will have many friends
when you need them.*

#21 FRIENDS

They emerge
as spring green shoots
with buds unfurling
you had no idea were planted there!

In soil patches
through the night
they grow and join
by next day's light
a quilt
warmly
lovingly
wrapped
around you.

*If you look back, you'll soon
be going that way.*

#22 AWARENESS

I'm inching along this edifice
past
gargoyles hulking 'round each ledge
and at every cornerstone.
Their statue mouths
drip
adrenaline dread
into forearms – mine,
prepped now with freezing chill.

Each one smiles knowingly
waiting for the go ahead
to nudge my legs over the edge.

“Hello there!” I say with forced gusto.
“Don't look back now,
but the balustrade is completely filled
and they all look just like you.”

The eyes shift,
(all it takes for gargoyles to wield control)
betraying a hint of confusion,
or perhaps I've caught them unawares.

“What?” I continue, growing braver,
“Nothing back there but a funhouse of mirrors?”

Their eyes bulge forth now
into monsters
begging me to resist.
Instead, I laugh
all at once bulletproof
(or nearly so).

Awareness
is the shining armor
upon which mirror reveals mirror
merely reflecting illusions.
Relief and release
are the antidotes showing the way forward.

*If you don't enjoy what you have,
how could you be happier with more?*

#23 HAPPIER

I don't want more.
I don't need more.
Platitudes.
Rectangular, white gauze platitudes
stuck on and on yourself
to bandage disappointment.

It is not enough.
It is never enough.
Reality always
pulls you back to reveal the sore.

When
savoring the oil and vinegar salad
happens at our picnic,
when
summer grass curls delighted toes,
when
the lantern lifted during noel caroling
catches visible breaths released
with joy into the wintery air

then

our shared laughter
will change bitter dressings
into sweet abundance
unmasked.

*The whole world is a narrow bridge;
the important thing is not to be afraid.*

#24 NARROW BRIDGE

An opening appears
turning at a new sign.
Arrow
to unexpected space.
Park car.
Stairs running up
to the stadium entrance gate.
Find Section.
Row.
Seat.
Universe!

An unexpected acquaintance sits down.
A new convo starts up.
Old habits, meanwhile,
beg for the chance
to lean me further over the railing
and fall,
fall me away.

I catch my breath,
feeling dread curl in the pit of my stomach.
Focus on breathing out visions
of loss and love.
Pull out tears
from inside a tunnel of memories
leading out to the concourse,
caught,
as in a recent sleeping dream demand
to see my ticket stub.
Only as real as that.

After the game,
I cross the bridge to where I parked,
body held safely aloft,
head no longer afraid of fear,
just newly curious
as to what will happen next.

A kind word warms for three winters.

#25 KIND WORD

With your kind word
we repair inside to where it's warm
from the one season
this 3-season porch
can't weather.

Here we speak the unspoken.

"Where do I know you from?"

"We've never met."

Yet here we are
brought together in from the cold
sharing a toast
fireside,
après ski,
ala chalet chat mode.

"Did you get that sweater in Iceland?"

"Yes, it was a quick stopover changing planes.
Land of fire and ice. And yours?"

"My mother knitted it
during the ravages of raging hormones
when she turned 50."

"Ha! More fire and ice."

"She shared that with me,
seems like a lifetime ago."

"Or many."

"I'll drink to that! To another lifetime!"

"And another!"

We Pause, savoring the moment
before pressing Play
when we must step outside again
each into our separate unknowns.

Don't mistake temptation for opportunity.

#26 TEMPTATION

Vining tendrils
daily climb cliff faces of air,
each nearby leaf, branch or twig
a potential toehold cleft for clinging
with lateral handholds
carving the way skywards.

Meanwhile, the river
winds its own path
through sinking downdrafts
grounded in earth's firm foundation —
though even there
beware of shifts and cracking!

Deep breaths coincide with each step up
until timeout along the route
for plants to rest in the coolness of night,
sipping sun's sugary nectar drinks.

Temptation offers
grasping places to the side
sensations to latch onto.
Taste, feel and savor each
suspended there upon your precipice.

But don't jump to conclusions!

Route your climb
alongside the flowers.
Feel your rainbow petals unfold
their slow and twirling
season's journey up and out
into the blue.

Do not desire what you do not need.

#27 DESIRE

Desired or not,
needed or not,
desire is a need —

that arrow shooting
from Eros's bow
arriving unexpectedly
out of the blue
as a finger touch gently
to the jugular
where, neck borne,
a mosquito has just pricked
now smashed on skin
with heat and blood
rising
from which (quite possibly)
never to recover.

An old broom knows where the dirt is.

#28 OLD BROOM

Has seen it all.
Explored every seamy side
seam opening.

Been there.
Wise to the floor plan.

Knows what cracks always
need the sideways brushing action
to draw away
accumulated gunk.

Can see right through you.

Hides and seeks.
Seeks and finds.

Has no answers
but does illuminate the questions.

Can teach so much.

With handle, shaft and bristle cap
comes to lecture hall every day.
Returns to private office
in self-named closet.

Knows the fantasies occupying the dreamer
while each frond gets busy.
Invites apprentices
to join third shift
in nightlong
magical neuron release
whisking it all away.

Has a way of showing places
we've stopped looking.

Brought out
with nowhere else to place it
leaves you,
simply,
there to face it.

*Luck sometimes visits a fool, but
it never sits down with him.*

#29 LUCK VISITS A FOOL

To err is human, to forgive divine.

Am I,
the blind follower
of stubborn habit mind
righteous spurred
justice driven
picked on
flailing unthinking
uncorked and errant,
on a fool's errand?

In the heat of the moment,
heart lodged in throat
blood running hot
then cold
unfairness feeds a roiling
ravenous
culprit released into corridors
carrying useless baggage up to my head,
I'm coming up empty.

Is the key to ask for love,
going deep
into hurt within
tenderized
sore even to the touch,
as docent administering an overdue exam?

It is no fool who sits down with himself knowing,
luck there that day or not,
love is observing you
crashing through waves of
fear, shame, anger, despair
and follows you turning the pages
all the way to the final question
the answer being yes,
this test will be taken again and again.

*A ship in harbor is safe, but
that's not why ships are built.*

#30 SAFE IN HARBOR

Trees provide solace
from sun and storm,
returning me home to harbor
safe in their sheltering arms.

What keeps me up at night
visits in my dreams
with one and the same yearning.

To ski fast straight down
fresh and alive,
to take the trail
just up and over the next hill,
to go back, yes,
but not yet,
not yet.

A freezing fog has settled
today
over everything
including me.
My spruce is laden with
crystallized needles
of rime ice
coating every limb,
breathtaking,
beautiful.

But it would be dangerous
now
to set forth in motion
this rime coated ship,
these ice sheathed wings.
In time, the sun will melt these things
and send me once more out to ski
through wind, sea and sky.

When that day arrives
I will be ready!

*We must always have old memories
and young hopes.*

#31 HOPE

DNA holds the past
deep within
and will never let go.
Memories make us rich,
but there are things only cells
remember,
burning
with a spark of the eternal.
What made two grandfathers
and a grandmother
board onto a ship alone across the sea?

RNA, on the other hand,
ventures out courageous as
three teenage ancestors
bravely venturing forth.
Daily.
Every moment even.
Here returns our messenger
carrying hope
and renewal
feeding waiting dreamers
dreams to keep us eternally young.