

MARGARET MALLOCH ZIELINSKI
THREE POEMS

SHOPPING FOR SHOES

My car is ready, its engine throbbing
as I slide inside and drive to the mall.
Muzak plays, romancing the women parading

slowly past the stores. Humming,
I hasten towards the shoeshop, dreaming
of the pleasures waiting.

A young man, blond, tanned and bulging,
hovers to serve me, "I have what you want,"
shows me the softest Italian leather—

silky to touch—rose-coloured sandals,
entrancing, enchanting. He straddles
the footstool, warm brown fingers slip

my foot in, caressing my toes.
How my skin tingles. He fondles
the leather, tracing the seams, the heat

makes my foot swell—he gently
withdraws it.
Inflamed and bewitched

what can I do
but purchase three pairs,
one pair for tonight and two for next week.

AS I READ TO MY GRANDSON I FIND MYSELF WONDERING
ABOUT MARY AND THAT LAMB

How did she feel having some creature
follow her everywhere,
did she enjoy the company,
could the lamb talk—
animals usually can in nursery rhymes—
did they discuss the other children, other sheep
or Mary's teacher, their favourite books?

Was Mary annoyed at always being followed?
I would be. She must have longed
for some privacy, some time alone,
time to talk to the other children
unobserved, uninterrupted—
probably a lamb that seemed so insensitive
wouldn't just stand there and listen—

which makes me wonder what kind of creature
that lamb was. Did he have no life of his own,
didn't he want to gambol
with the other lambs, join in their baaing?
Was he ostracised by the others,
was he unbalanced, delusional,
was that why he followed Mary?

Today we'd never tolerate such behaviour:
Mary could call the police, go to court,
get a restraining order. You never know
where that kind of obsession might lead—
the lamb might go mad
and pummel her with his hooves,
chew out her throat.

By now I am quite upset and decide
never to read the rhyme again.
When my grandson begs, I say no.
You never can tell what effects
such a story might have on an impressionable mind,
what might one day turn an innocent child
into a stalker.

ROMANTIC RELATIONS

*No one in my family has ever died of love
 What happened, happened but nothing myth inspiring.
 Romeos of consumption? Juliets of diphtheria?
 Some have even achieved decrepitude.*
 —Wisława Szymborska, “Family Album”

I always wanted romantic relations,
 cousins fraught with passion, dying young
 of love. Each night I read steamy novels
 of rugged heroes who wooed wenches,
 raven haired and beguiling. They met
 in the moonlight, tucked into her glove—
 a note saying he’d love her forever,
 would lay down his life (and he did) for one night
 of bliss with her in his arms, the stars up above.
No one in my family has ever died of love

I’m sorry to say. Uncle Albert died young,
 but he choked on a kipper—he was eating too fast.
 And so as children we were always warned to chew
 our food slowly, and watch out for those insidious
 bones lurking with intent to kill us too.
 Great-grandpa had a heart attack at forty, striding
 home from the docks, dropped down in the street
 one evening in winter, was robbed of his boots
 and long underwear too as he lay dying.
What happened happened, but nothing myth inspiring.
 At twenty my grandmother had a wild affair—
 falling unwisely for a charming rogue
 who after only three months found he couldn’t keep
 the promises he’d made, and exploration being in vogue,
 joined an expedition crossing the Gobi in a jeep.
 But Gran lived till eighty and died of anemia.
 Uncle George had *une affaire de coeur*—
 the lady was married—it caused quite a stir—
 but they both lived till ninety and died of leukemia.
Romeos of consumption? Juliets of diphtheria?

There are none in my family. We are all such sensible practical souls—our Scottish Presbyterian blood, I suppose. Grim Grandma McGregor's house was as cold as the grave. From the pictures on her parlor walls, mud-splashed highland cattle shivered in some wintry gale, glared icy eyed, froze any passionate thoughts into lassitude. We grew fat on her stews, greasy and grey, on which scraps of ancient sheep floated—meals we prayed daily to be spared. Still the family thrives, lives long, earns a good livelihood. *Some have even achieved decrepitude.*