

CRIME & ORNAMENT



poems
by Tamsyn Farr

phafours press, 2025
a pesbo production from
La Pêche, Quebec Canada
www.pearlpirie.com/phafours

Images: Kintsugi of Noritake by Mr. Suginaka

3rd printing.

ISBN: 978-1-7380645-2-6

Crime & Ornament

by Tamsyn Farr

To my once and future detractors

Cross Border Shopping

America was K-mart the Beautiful
when I was seven and in love
with Teddy Ruxpin. We toured
his palace of jewel-toned sodas

and Christmas pyjamas
whenever Dad ran out of quick grits.
A ticking choir of watches
invents time in their glass display

while I walk the waxed tile's
gleaming fjords between high shelves.
One watch had a face with Mickey Mouse
whose white-gloved hands

point out minutes and hours.
I have no memory of asking—
only beaming at my wrist
in the backseat of the car.

Dad pulled over just before
the bridge that was the border
to mask Mickey before we crossed.
Crouched by the front wheel

behind the headlights that opened
eye-like, he dragged a flint of roadside gravel
again and again across the smooth glass
encasing my mouse, his spell of numbers.

Back in the car, my arm re-adorned,
I ran a finger along the shallow slices
and Dad told the man with the gun
that we had nothing to declare.

In the Bleak Mid-Winter

“she and her mother had sprayed
their Christmas tree, in the closed
garage, a week before, with lead paint.”
- Sharon Olds

Was the tree not mid-century aluminum
enough? Or not green enough? Forest green
but not electric enough, or not Christmas
enough? It wanted for nothing; she wanted
anyway. Was it the fade of dust or years. Was
it never green enough to begin with. Glowing
green like light through leaves. A garnish! A
sweet, sage pagan who first brought a fir into
the shelter, a smirk of chlorophyll in the
colddark, to remember colour. A smart slick
somebody who made the tree a not-tree,
never alive so it lives forever, decking the
halls with an endless Christmas, our Elvis
blue and our Mariah Carey insatiable, echoing
around the 24-hour pharmacy for eternity!
When the not-tree replaces the tree, it must
be an ideal tree, the perfect representation of
the perfect tree, the emblematic
oversaturated cartoon tree, and unfortunately
there is an imagination's exploding canister
of ways to die just trying to decorate.

Lovin' It

Piercing gun cocked: pop goes
the sheen of a flat world

conspicuous, daubed
in all-angled light.

A footnote in the fiscal year
liquidates the wax museum

in some sun's hollow centre.
Now two-thumbed hands

shake at rates reflecting
the cadences of the real world.

The death rattle's goo goo
ga ga: the last dead giveaway.

I haven't left the house in three days.
I can no longer distinguish

the hymns of the machine
from the voices of home.

Plants, animals, all life needs
(light, shelter, spaghetti) and all life makes

(love, Fabergé eggs, feature films
about amorous dogs sharing spaghetti)



and then dies. A little needing and dying
is all it takes to open my mouth.

I gulp down the world that is not
the world. It passes through me

untransformed. I survive at sea
on the blood of birds I've pinioned.

My guts go on for miles
blown full of breathing.

I teach myself to make a balloon ostrich.
This may be the pinnacle of making.

The redundancy of weeping
when you could be making:

long legs, flightless wings, big eggs
in waiting, gestating rubies, brass fasteners,

a golden yolk, a pendant that reminds me
of my mollusk, my mother
of pearl.



Ornaments Wanted: Dead or Alive

On the mantle, a BBQ lighter. It came in a pack of two: red and blue. Its long, flame-tipped finger lights the fireplace. Left too close, it later catches fire and explodes and leaves specks of soot over the whole goddamn house because that's how hot fire gets, hot enough to blow up the fire-maker and ash-festoon every surface. And at the blue fire's centre is six months or years of sad and unfigleed time: to hose you down and feed you peanuts, to talk to your druid therapist, to recall that hangover nap on the toilet in a bathroom for employees of the research unit of the psych hospital, to be gainfully employed, to step into the cold shower like a chest-beating Swede and fantasize pleasantly about being fed into a wood chipper. Mulch-me becomes the beadwork on another disenchanted century.

He wasn't wrong to look for the ornament embedded in the object. He wasn't wrong that fads lead to landfills adorned with dated kitchen cabinetry. Every Hummel figurine is haunted. Snipped from their forests, my indoor trees yellow around me.

(For the love of Christ, go water your plants).

Yellow Fly of the Dismal Swamp

Leadlight wings land your gold
body on my ring finger. I do

not even know your name.
My other hand unsprings

the app that says what
creatures are what and well

you have a right to know:
it believes you to be

a biting horse-fly, highly
aggressive. Strange, you

seem serene, untroubled
by seething urges. But perhaps

your rubbing hands reveal
a cartoon zeal to dig in.

Or there are swamps nearby
after all—I have not

noticed. My looking locks
onto your eyes, two targets

layered green iridescent
and black beyond ken.

He Objected to Scallops on Shoes

There once was a man named
[Adolf Franz Karl Viktor Maria] Loos¹
an architect with aberrant views
the embroidered and floral he
preached were immoral
but he made naked children his muse

¹. Loos (1870–1933) preyed on 8- to 10-year-old girls from poor families whom he hired as models in his studio. He is known for his manifesto *Ornament and Crime* that argued that the “evolution of culture is synonymous with the removal of ornament from utilitarian objects” and that “[o]rnamment is not merely produced by criminals, it commits a crime itself by damaging national economy and therefore its cultural development” and that “he who goes to listen to the Ninth Symphony and who then sits down to draw up a wallpaper pattern, is either a rogue or a degenerate.”

Man of My Time

Of course I couldn't miss his
silhouette. The patterned wallpaper
disappears there, a man-shaped keyhole in
the wall between centuries.
The fizzing glee of jamming a knife in,
puncturing the condescending aristocrat,
savouring the sumptuous irony of a
pedophile calling a Flora Danica
teacup degenerate.

Where is my shadow, seeing his? All
darknesses indistinguishably all-erasing.
Both believing ourselves evolved. How
much I want to be good, to see myself as
good, for the future to look back on me as
good.

If a future is allowed to exist. Give
them their schadenfreude. Carve my bones
with degenerate joy.

Tamsyn Farr is a degenerate, straggler, marauder,
buffoon, confidence trickster, latent criminal,
pathological phenomenon, and poet, who goes around
Wakefield, Quebec in velvet hose with gold braid like a
fairground monkey.

www.pearlpirie.com/phafours
a pesbo production
from La Pêche, Quebec

