

Morning Lessons

At sunrise, I row. This morning the river is choppy. Behind me in the bow seat, Master K is silent. I feel his patience, my own frustrations. My body is slow, slowing down to the change of the season, a dam of dampness and heat building to shore against the oncoming of a cold front.

I'll give myself needles tonight, I tell myself, to dredge the damp and alleviate the stagnation along the liver and gallbladder meridians.

Master K has a grand piano in his grand living room that makes its own music when a key is played. He bought it after his wife left with their two children. When snow falls on the Mississippi, he goes to Thailand, meeting the local women, fighting with the local men. When the river thaws, he comes home to row and carves. Master K is also a master carpenter. He eats vegetables only and raw, for thirty years.

The river heaves. Our boat cuts the waves...

Along the riverbank, jeweled weeds grow next to stinging nettles and poison ivy, an antidote for the burnt skin. Their translucent stems look like human bones and joints. Plants resembling human organs will heal those organs, I learned from my herb master, like strawberries for the heart inflammations, pears for cooling the lungs, and avocados to warm and moist the uterus. Will the jeweled weeds ease the pain in joints, and connect a torn tendon or ligament?

Master K sprinkles a seed into my palm. It's tiny, a period at the end of a sentence.

"Touch it, gently, with your fingertip," he says.

It explodes in the center of my palm and flies off.

"The seed contains so much energy that it waits for just the right touch for its flight."

Later in my herb class, I'll learn that the seed is called touch-me-not, good for inflamed and scattered heart spirits. I'll also learn from my friend that in the Philippines, it's called *Makahiya*, the shy one, the reticent one; their nerve endings open to the slightest suggestion.

We come out of the water drenched in sweat. How did I do this morning, I ask?

You didn't do worse, says Master K, smiling.