

Two Poems by F.J. Bergmann

Meet and Marry a Gorgeous Russian Queen

—a spam subject line

To win her, you must learn the language of birds. You Google to find out just what kinds of birds migrate between here and Siberia. You will build her a crystal castle of salt, dried from pure, sweet tears that you wept in disappointment over celebrity porn viruses and fraudulent penis extenders. Even on the paid matrimonial websites, she is the only truth shining among thousands of false promises like a genuine gold crown surrounded by rhinestone tiaras—or a shark’s mouthful of yellowing teeth—and she looks damn good in those dollar-store bras she bought with the money you sent her for airfare. Each successive e-mail has an explanation for why she still doesn’t have enough for the visa, like an egg you crack open to find another egg enclosing still-smaller eggs. The final egg is Fabergé, with a jeweled window where you look inside to see a little cottage with a tiny garden and a couple holding hands. She has a doctorate in chemical engineering but you assure her you are completely, totally healthy and drug- and alcohol-free. Anyway, she’ll never know if you’re careful to always undress in the dark. She can cook anything, as long as it’s not lentils, and you promise she won’t need to cook. You plan to treat her to McDonald’s at least twice a week and you’ve got a whole case of ramen noodles left over from the Y2K stash. You even hauled last year’s Xmas tree to the curb, adorned the mailbox with plastic flowers, and swept the sidewalk in front of the house every day for a year in anticipation of her arrival. You decide not to tell her about the foreclosure until she’s gotten used to the place a little more. She steps down from her hut on chicken legs with a faintly amused smile, as it crouches to take a crap in the next-door neighbor’s yard. She looks *something* like her photograph and you are beginning to wish you’d changed—or at least washed—your *I’m With Stupid* t-shirt. “Hi there,” you say, with a bashful grin. Her accent

is adorable but a bit difficult to understand.
She is saying something about deception; or, more likely, conception: women always want kids. And something about Las Vegas, and—you're pretty sure about this one—getting a gift horse.

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Riding

from *Red*, Kelli Hoppmann, oil on panel, 2008

After crossing the same path for the third time,
you tore the bread you'd baked for Grandmother
into crumbs. By the time you crossed it again,
birds had come and gone into a uniformly pale sky.

You saved the meat for two more days, and then
the wolf found you, or you were lucky enough
to find him. Perhaps he was lost, too. His collar
was studded with silver letters you couldn't read.

Huddled against each other at night under your red
cloak, you dreamed each other's dreams. He brought
bloody bits of nameless flesh you ate without answers.
You drank from the same streams. He let you ride him,

loping tirelessly north. You promise you will unbuckle
his collar when your cloak has raveled to scarlet threads.



image by Kelli Hoppmann

Bio:

F.J. Bergmann writes poetry and speculative fiction, often simultaneously, appearing in *The 5-2*, *Cleaver*, *North American Review*, *On Spec*, *Right Hand Pointing*, and elsewhere, and functioning, so to speak, as editor of *Star*Line*, the journal of the Science Fiction Poetry Association (sfpoetry.com), and poetry editor of *Mobius: The Journal of Social Change* (mobiusmagazine.com). Recent awards include the 2012 Rannu Prize for speculative poetry, the 2012 *Heartland Review* Joy Bale Boone Award, and the 2013 SFPA Elgin chapbook award. Four chapbooks have been published by independent small presses: *Out of the Black Forest* (Centennial Press, 2012), *Constellation of the Dragonfly* (Plan B Press, 2008), *Aqua Regia* (Parallel Press, 2007), and *Sauce Robert* (Pavement Saw Press, 2003).