

A Fine Meal [Ars Poetica]

i. *Harmony*

A fine Chinese meal
my mother said
is made of five flavors,
a blending of elemental portions.

What is *sour*, she said, if not the flesh of plum?
To know sour is to taste green
watering across your tongue,
to feel the force
of wood striking your open palm.

How simple, *salt*, she said,
and how necessary,
married as she is to water.

And there, always, is *savory*, cavorting
with pungent and spice,
lover in autumn waiting,
gilded under the iridescent harvest moon.

Proceed lightly with *bitter*, she said. (Who has not known its pinch?)
Cooling to the heart,
it favors full sun, its joy in fire.

Lastly, send two kisses of *sweet* to the Kitchen God.
Like Indian summer, sweet
should be used sparingly,
for too much worries the earth.

Embrace all five, she said.
Repudiate not one.

ii. *Paradox*

A fine Irish meal,
my father said,
is a *made* thing,

constructed with care,
(like the spire of a skyscraper
or the precision of a cesium beam)

concocted from what is available
(like that shard of blue limestone, jagged in your hand
and those mounds of cool moss, lush underfoot.)

At the same time,
and with the same intensity,
an *inspired* thing,
divined, he said—
a happenstance of light thrown
by the Spirit
or a sprite.
Star seltzer effervescing against your tongue.
Some nexus of intuition.