

At the Mariner's Chapel, Auvillar

St. Catherine carved in white marble, vigils
over the remains of a church once filled
with grateful gifts from sailors who thanked her
for their safe return. Today between a timbered ceiling
and the cool embrace of undecorated granite
mysterious landscape paintings grace the walls.
Scenes of fog, with dark hints of mast or bow,
yellow orbs that suggest sun, brown brush strokes
of bird feather, impressions of distorted angel wings.
The artist is reading a book. I approach to ask him,
myself perhaps too, how much of what has emerged
to shimmer indistinct on these canvases, was born
of clear intent, how much the random encounter
of paint and canvas — an emergence, absent
the strong arm of will. Where I wonder has the ego
yielded lines to shadowing, a palette of sun
and gathering clouds into feathering, flight. His reply,
tossed like a pebble echoes: *does it not all come
from the void?* Myself, at the well's rim, listening.

recipient of the *Image/ New York Encounter Poetry Prize, 2017*

Roots, Exposed

(1)

Towpath, Washington D.C.

Above a narrow berth on the far bank
of Rock Creek, winters' bouts of storm
have unsheathed a maple's spindly roots.
Stripped of earth, bleached of hue
and mossy cover, it angles out
over an unstable jut of what was once
its ground and sustenance. Gone the web—
cellulose and lignin, sap and circulation
that breathed: *tree, truth, truce.*

(2)

Sierra, near Truckee, CA

Angr, from the Norse—grief, loss. A slow
erosion, like the raging creek, rerouted
by earthmovers and fill, condominiums
and the scream of macadam, where once
Wahoe women gathered bulbs, their infants
resting on manzanita shrub. Water slicing through
granite granular — canyon.

(3)

Appalachian Trail, VA

Observe the slow burn: a prone
Virginia pine decomposes for all to see.
A beetle army has ravaged here. Hieroglyphic
trace of their tunneling, grievous fungal trail.

White fir saplings hug old-growth pine—
implicit intimacy—again and again
this message: *What's next?* (his last words) . . .
a different forest.

Second Place Winner, Beulah Rose Poetry Contest
Published in *Smartish Pace*, 2014

Medium

In the valley a red-winged blackbird's call
echoes the keening wind of March. Solo,
atop a utility pole, then a lodge pole pine,
he peddles his sharp, insistent cry. His head
swivels, and I imagine he's following me,
separated from his circle of call and response.
I'm hoping for a medium — four months
and I still can't conjure your voice. The first
weeks after you died, a lone robin visited
my back yard daily. Your grandson found him
oddly friendly, so I would interrogate him:
shape shifter, robbery suspect, your envoy?
You wanted to "go out singing" so why not
return as a robin, the breed your bird-loving
mother Madelyn loved? I loved his singing,
distinct in the dawn chorus, serenading me
at dusk. But even his aria did not unlock
your boisterous baritone from memory. Nor
did you come to me in a dream. So I turned
to beer and baseball, cheered the Phillies' early
season success, watched their sluggers stumble,
even took in the All Star Game, in your beat-up
recliner no less. No dice; no word.

So I'm back
to birds. I've deciphered a lark's duet
with a twenty-nine bell carillon in Bruges,
queried a jackdaw on a Brussels balcony,

expecting a message from you. Then today,
the iridescent flash of a Stellar's Jay
interrupted my lunchtime reverie. He hops,
squawks, and I hear: *What of this beauty
would I not steal for you — this sky,
the sun, my cobalt brilliance into your joy.*
Only that's not your voice, at least not
any voice I'd recognize as yours. Don't tell
me this obsession with song is your gift —
that Jungian saw about receiving your life's
errand from the other-gendered parent. If so,
what did I miss in hearing only the sports
announcer's voice, that voice more rehearsed
for show tunes and audiences (*Something familiar,
something peculiar, something for everybody...*)
than for poetry?

I can still see you
in your last hospital room, my book of poetry
in your hands, curious about the origins,
probing obscurities. You did love the baseball
poem, the one I dedicated to you, but I had to
explain: it was *your* voice I'd channeled.

Finalist, Ruth Stone Prize, *Hunger Mountain* Winter 2013/14

Their voices

The heat — the close of another August day.
I rummage drawers of half-sleep for the voices
of my three aunts, lest time erase
the special timbre of their speech: the way

Ann's laughter endures, despite the din
of a decade's chatter, erupts in raspy
bursts — gin fizz from a barkeep's
wand. Her Lucky Strike aloft. Then

Flo died. Yet I still hear that twang
in her vowels, the wah-wah of a trumpet
solo at the Sons of Italy dance. Last, let
Ginny's cigarillo tones request a tango.

My memory's the vessel — an old jar, lid
punched with holes, to let the fireflies live.

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