

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Judy Brackett: Three Poems

Judy Brackett · Wednesday, October 25th, 2017

Judy Brackett lives and writes in a small town in California's northern Sierra Nevada foothills. Her poem "As If There Were No Steel" took second place in *Cultural Weekly's* 2014 Jack Grapes Poetry Contest. Her stories and poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Epoch*, *The Maine Review*, *Catamaran*, *burntdistrict*, *Commonweal*, *The Midwest Quarterly*, *West Marin Review*, *Miramar*, *Subtropics*, *Crab Orchard Review*, and elsewhere.

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### Defining Ourselves

In a picture-book Webster's, under  
 "unbelievable" or "harebrained idea,"  
 you might find circus elephants balancing  
 on tiny stools, their almond-small wet eyes  
 empty,  
 de-clawed bears riding tricycles, monkeys  
 banging on tambourines, also horses  
 clattering up dozens of stairs  
 to a wobbly platform and diving into  
 a not-so-deep pool, the relentless sun  
 an aloof observer.

Let's put a girl in a red spangly bathing suit  
 on the horse and watch them dive, together. And  
 if one of them lands wrong, breaks a leg or ruins  
 her eyes, let's train a new horse and praise  
 the gutsy girl for coming back for more.  
 Let's give them names like Lizzy and Lottie,  
 or Red Lips and Sonora. Let's watch the girl  
 on the platform casually paint her own lips,  
 turn a slow turn, sketch a blind wave, and climb  
 onto the horse, clutching his mane in her fists.

Let us admire the divers' beauty, their grace.  
 Let us feel the splash that shames  
 and defines us all.

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## Flight Plan

Bone blades jut where her wings were once  
affixed. Rolling her shoulders back and down,  
she can feel the pulse, the strength of them,  
can almost remember flying.

Riding the bike down the steep and winding  
pot-holed lane—airborne, almost. Swinging  
on the old saddle hanging from the rafters  
in the hayloft, hay bales stacked

against the walls, mice nests, bird nests, barn  
cats prowling, the owl tucked into his high-up  
corner, haydust motes fogging the air,  
she sneezing and swinging—no horse,

just girl and saddle, the barn window thrown  
open to the green world, she wondering  
if she can swing high enough, fast enough,  
far enough, swim/fly out the window and dive

into the pond or the house-high haystack.  
No, not the haystack—needles, errant pitchforks.

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## Tomorrow

This flat wide-open place is  
airless, but she doesn't know that  
yet. She dreams, walks to  
the library, checks out  
her-five-books-per-day ration,  
sits under  
a poplar on  
the way home and reads a couple,  
reads the rest that night, treks back to  
the library tomorrow,  
thinking that her bare feet are carving ruts in  
the earth. Running to  
the edge of  
town she wonders at  
the line at  
the curb of  
the world where green or brown or white meets  
blue (the beginning or the end?).  
The orderly fields—

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in summer  
blindingly green and smelling of  
dirt and sunrays,  
in winter  
crop-stubbed or snow buried—  
are alluring and terrifying, pulling her to  
their plainness, their silences.  
She writes songs and sings them to  
herself, to  
the books, to  
the fields, to  
the sky.  
She dreams. She waits for  
something.  
She leaves.

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