

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Kari Gunter-Seymour: Four Poems

Kari Gunter-Seymour · Wednesday, May 5th, 2021

The Weeds In This Garden

Long ago, I built a self outside myself.

I ate what my family ate, answered

to my name, but when they said *let us pray*,

I kept my eyes open. There is a price

to be paid for resistance. Whatever

you call me, I have called myself

worse, invented words made up

of letters from my own name.

Now the backs of my hands, all bone

and strain, I think cannot be mine.

Who hasn't killed herself at least once,

only to grow into someone needier?

Who hasn't bent with her wounds

to a mutinous patch, weeds

shooting up like false rhubarb,

every wisp, stem, and sodden pith

a testament? Who hasn't scratched

at the question of what it means to be here?

*

Pain-Ripened

Because my job was to stay clean and thankful,

mostly invisible, as though telling me what to do

told me who I was, I rubbed basil

between finger and thumb to breathe the inside
of a thing, walked the verges of muddy stream,
sugared ridge and hilly breast, clear

of knotted root and dirt-wrapped wire,
color-flushed on wildflowers, my mind a buzz
of song, psalm and sonnet.

Here. A dead bird. A tiny Christ, riven
in light, my sorrow lifted in wisps and moans
to the mouth of the wind.

Shedding blouse, skirt, tender garments,
I opened my flesh to pain-ripened sun,
swayed to the pitch and pluck of sky.

In some languages to be *carried*
is the same as to *fly*.

*

Ruby May

My mama hates children and dogs.
Even her own. No matter that she makes
this clear, announces it regular.
Wherever she goes, there's a child
or hound set to wallow her, as if
she smells of jelly beans or Alpo.
Manic, she will coo you penniless.
Depressed, she'll peel the skin
off your face with nary a whip
of her curly head. Now she says,
I wanted to live seemly, set out to be kind,
reaches for her Bible. She says
Uncle Bub used to tickle her
up under her chin and otherwise
on whiskey nights. Says she and Fanny June
would build forts with kitchen chairs
and Grammie's starflower quilt,
crawl deep inside, lure the cat
with baloney, lie side-by-side,
lock fingers in pinky swear,
hearts crossed, hoped he'd die.

*

Bethal Ridge Cemetery

On the edge that time thins, I stood

with aching arms, in a wrinkled dress.
Among the stones a holier-than-thou,
dark-robed and flailing,
recited psalms by the shovelful.

It's the body that feels pain,
but the brain delivers it.
To this day, sometimes driving
I see black wings flapping between
bare branches and overreact.

Someone once told me we make
everyone in our dreams into another
version of ourselves, that rage isn't rage
but sorrow turned back on itself,
the shape made of regret.

There must have been birds,
the noon-time smell of grass.
I can't say. Feathered arias
and earthy balms are not meant for
a woman with a fist in each pocket.



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