

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

LaWanda Walters: Two Poems

LaWanda Walters · Thursday, June 18th, 2015

LaWanda Walters received an M.A. in Literature from California State University at Humboldt and an M.F.A. in Poetry from Indiana University, where she won the Academy of American Poets Prize. Her poems have appeared in *The Antioch Review*, *The Cincinnati Review*, *The Georgia Review*, *The Laurel Review*, *North American Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Shenandoah*, *Southern Poetry Review*, and *Sou'wester*. "Her Art" was chosen by Natasha Trethewey for *Best New Poets 2007*. Her poem "Marilyn Monroe" appears in *Obsession: Sestinas in the Twenty-First Century* (Dartmouth College Press, 2014). "Goodness in Mississippi" was chosen by Sherman Alexie for *Best American Poetry 2015*. She lives in Cincinnati.

"Rosebud," He Whispered

Rosebud, of course, was her clitoris.
See how sexual it looks on the sled,
pursed but also reaching,
more like a tulip, really, a little hand
grasping, wanting to clutch,
its drooping, languorous, coy design
that waits to be plucked and sucked?

So how could the great director resist
such a trite and famous
endearment, its multifold and useful
associations and democratic
thrust, the innocent little rose imprint
an American kid could sit on to ride down
a slope of snow, the red sled sliding,
slipping, the way when your hands are cold
you can't hold on to a thing, the way
life always goes, the tragic arc?
And so Orson Welles could not help hearing
of that fetching image
and knowing how his film would be set off,
such momentum and velocity carrying

the narrative and also the director's career
 careening downward, everything more
 than the sum of its parts, turned on that flexible,
 athletic metaphor, "*le mot juste*"
 that would blossom and snowball
 all the way down from the man's directing
 of *Citizen Kane* to his acting
 in a commercial for Paul Masson rosé wine.
 I used to take my wine glass and click it against
 the glass screen of the television. That slight
 image, white on a red sled, little red tongue
 in the icy cold—such honest transport is hard to steer
 as it takes you, headlong, where it will.

Falling All Those Stories Down

(remembering, ten years later)

Imagine the kind of love,
 the instant-coffee marriage,
 that fastness of vows
 some could give each other

to jump from the high window
 together, holding hands.
 Those are stories we can almost bear,
 people flying down the towers,

falling with the debris,
 lucky enough to lock arms
 so in twos or threes
 they fell like angels.

Unbearable to watch how some flew
 alone, turned upside-down like
 a paper doll or a ship's sail.
 Unbearable to think of the ones inside.

The ones who jumped
 had to leave the burning others
 whose pain I have no right
 to speak of—whose stories

are as far away as stars.
 But some of you gripped hands,
 while all those stories were burning
 down, you held fast to a strange hand.

It was anyone's hand, and now
the strangest love,
the quickest love of saying *Jump with me*
and be the one who understands my life.

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