

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Nancy Murphy: Two Poems

Nancy Murphy · Sunday, June 15th, 2025

### What Is Held

My mother was a woven basket,  
carrying warm laundry

from the back hall dryer.  
Expanding and narrowing

for whatever we needed—  
Towels, oranges, encouragement.

Multicolored stripes crisscrossed  
her body like a lifeline that lost

its way home. Sides folding in  
on themselves, the ways things fail.

The narrow opening at the top.  
Perfect urn for ashes. I didn't want that

Catholic wake with her cold sleeping  
body. But I wasn't there.

I had my own basket, in it a tiny infant.  
When my mother's basket broke,

I should have gone home, kept her  
alive. I'm telling you, I could have.

Her final Instructions—  
I should not come back

for the funeral. *The funeral.*  
She knew. What basket holds

that knowing? What a cruel choice

I had: Save mother or daughter.

But my mother decided, fed me  
from that last basket of bread.

I only had to swallow  
like a baby bird.

\*

## Unsung

“Perhaps...every song has an unsung third stanza, something brutal  
snaking underneath us as we blindly sing.” — from Ada Limon’s “Another Anthem”

Where do secrets lie? Truth hides, sometimes  
out in the open, like when I pretend to know how  
to eat a mango.

Is the third stanza unsung or do we deny  
singing it?

The tea was too strong today, and yet I sipped.  
That is how it starts. We sip and say nothing.  
We listen to the sound of jets overhead  
and fail to think of bombs.  
I have never heard a gunshot but I expect to.

I expect everything. I am waiting  
for everything.

These days there is a flatness like a Sunday  
morning with no Monday in sight.

What if the third stanza of every song is the secret  
of the universe, that illusive theory of everything?  
Like a final crossword clue that makes the  
puzzle pop into place.

But where does completion get us?

I am remembering the taste of that mango, how moist  
in my mouth, how wildly sweet, how I tore into it  
letting juices run to my elbows while I stood at the sink  
not caring if I was viewed. How I held the pit  
on my tongue until we were both spent.

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*(Featured image from [Pexels](#))*

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