

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.

(Featured image from [Pexels](#))

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