

SPRING 2018 SIXFOLD

Sweet Chariot

In the gathering dusk, a caravan of headlamps snaked up our lane. I searched out Father, who stepped from his cows, saying, “Little one, this ain’t good, git to your ma’s work.”

I couldn’t just up and leave, so I clumb into a empty water trough and watched in horror as white-sheeted ghouls pitched a line over the limb of a live oak, dangling Grandfather.

Then Daddy got dragged, ‘round and ‘round, nearly running into my rusting hidey-hole. Whoosh! The barn kindled. Scorched hide is something I need never smell again.

The intruders were too intent on mayhem to notice a despised black child runnin’ for her life. I pounded on the door of the maid’s quarters. Mom answered, saying; “Girl, what’s wrong?”

“They come for the farm! Pa’s dead, Gramps, too. It’s all set to burning like the gates of hell!”
“Cassie, get aholt of yourself, they’ll be comin’ for us next. We need to leave outta here.”

Mother couldn’t fund passage for two. With the train shrieking into the station, she handed over her purse, crying above the clamor, “Get to your auntie’s in Tupelo!”

Mama folded her hands in prayer—then pitched head first onto the gleaming rails. The train kept coming . . . the screeching grew louder . . . an’ it never stopped.

Standoff

A fed kicks my bumper—me half asleep on the truck bed—him looming ominous, khaki clad, weapon grasped, cuffs swinging, badge aglow in an early morning shimmer of sunlight.

I fake a snore, roll onto my back, flop an arm over my eyes, letting him know I'm not in the least, intimidated.

“Up against the cab. We do this easy or you make it hard, *your* call. You think the Stetson and boots make you a cowboy?”

“Get over yourself. The public's right to know is my beat. Come up with something original, I'd respect that.”

“Hand over your I. D. Hmm, we're seeking anarchists; the press . . . not yet. Next time you need a place to shut-eye, find a rest stop.”

With that, the lawman mounts up: radio squawking, rig rumbling, lights strobing, siren shrill. Dateline America; It's on!

On Being Verbal

I walked out loud—on unspoken assaults,
while you deny duplicity.

You screamed out loud—splintering barriers
with raucous rancor.

We cried out loud—our actions defy
abject apology.

Grounded

I was abruptly separated from my seat,
resulting in a face plant. It wasn't
an intentional flop on my part.

My hipflask spilt wilting range
grass and upsetting the trail boss.
He's well known for saddle sobriety.

There I lay,
with nary a team, reins,
or cache of liquor in hand.

The gathering wranglers smirk,
rolling eyeballs along
with their smokes.

It is utterly impossible to secure
solid footing amid steaming slurries of
manure and quickening freshets of horse piss.

Cookie helps me step up onto my buckboard,
saying I best sleep it off. Another miscue
will get me booted from this roundup.

I didn't really fall off the wagon; I merely took a
sip, resulting in a downward spiral. I don't think
drink is the problem; it helps keep me grounded.

Showing Me Love

It's the state highway departments
version of the Bridge to Nowhere,
sans suicide barrier.

A sign exhorts: NO JUMPING—
I skirt a roadblock, mount
a railing, and dangle my feet.

Below, the simmering surf gently
implores me to dwell in its depth,
trust in its undertow.

I leap—eyes wide open—expecting
to descend into a bed of kelp and
expire amid a flotilla of anemone.

Instead, urchins turn prickly,
drawing blood and attracting
predators.

The ebbing tide becomes a seminal,
spewing womb; intent on aborting
my rapture of the deep.

A mermaid half nelsons my shoulders,
life guards my rescue, beaches me like
flotsam, tweaks both nostrils,

mouths me breath, and turns my
head when I decant the ocean's
false narrative.

She rocks a buzz cut—long-tresses
being *so* Walt Disney—and insists
I seek counseling.

