

Poems for Sixfold
January, 2024

Today

Today you take your morning class
outdoors to sit in grass
to listen to what matters little
when the grass is sweet
and the sun is warm
and the air
is filled with life,
and new flowers
are worth more than old poems.

The Pine

Walking through the snow
in the deepest part of winter,
we found a pine tree
standing alone, its long
spiral limbs reaching out
like a mother's arms,
the ground beneath still warm
and plush with soft needles.

And for a giddy instant,
just before turning
back to the trail, I
caught a glimpse
of you and me lying
side by side,
flesh to flesh,
under the gentle spread
of that great tree,
delighting in a cool breeze
on a summer day, gazing
up at small specks of blue sky,
and wondering if there was
anything better in life
than spending this time
together: voyagers,
lovers and explorers of love.

The tree is here,
the sky is here,
the voyage has been taken.
And the love we found
is in every step,
every silent needle,
every single tear I let
fall upon this darkness.

Harvest Time

If I were to go insane,
it would be on a day like today,
a warm, bright October day,
with the music of Aaron Copland
(perhaps *The Promise of Living*)
washing me, soothing me,
nourishing me, offering me
a golden glimpse of that simpler
world, a tender land unsullied by guilt.
I would sit in silence and regard
the innocent brilliance of the
autumn leaves, and I would dream.
And while I was dreaming, the scene
would change, very slowly
and only slightly, until I became
a denizen of this other world,
this simple world, this dream world.

And then I would be content
to remain forever by this window,
seeing only what my insanity
allowed me to see, to be
a feckless hobo
on a slow-moving freight across
the golden splendor of this harvest time,
gliding toward a perfect autumn
twilight like the hands of a sculptor
forming the last traces of a perfect
smile upon my pliant face.

The Heron Returns

When that great, blue heron
first arrived, gracefully
dipping from a sky
clear as blue crystal,
you could dress and eat
without discomfort, finish
a sentence without pausing
to take a tortured breath.
You could venture out
of your four-wall world
to gaze at the stately bird
hunting in your rain-swollen creek.

But then the boat came
in the starless night, its
muffled oars caressing
the still water like a lover's touch.
It came for you, but you
wouldn't board, couldn't board,
called back by shrill, insistent
voices from the land, stern
reminders that you had
duties to attend, affairs to arrange,
stories to tell attentive listeners
hungry for a taste of the past,
still had people for whom
good-byes don't come easy.
The next morning
the heron had gone but you remained.

That summer the heron
didn't return. Every
day you sat waiting
at the window, draped
in your night clothes,
swollen ankles propped, back
arched in pain, razor-thin body
humbled by insistent fatigue.

When you did see the heron again,
when the great, silver-blue bird

unfolded her monster wings
in the warmth of the autumn sun,
you saw with new eyes, clear eyes.
You went out to meet her,
to hunt in the creek, to soar
in the crystal sky on strong
new wings, to embrace the clouds,
to fly off into the light,
leaving only your essence behind
like a creamy vapor trail.

The Squirrel
(April 8, 2017)

“Cruise missiles fired
at Syrian air base.” “Four
killed in Swedish
truck attack.”
War, death, disease,
despair, disregard.
The four horsemen galloping
down the middle of
Main Street, stupid, evil
grins pasted on their
grizzled white faces.
The sum of this morning’s misery
bellowing out like an angry mob
shaking its collective fist
at a world cowering
and terrified and transfixed.
A world dancing
in a fire of its own creation.

I refuse to see that world.
Not today anyway. I turn
my head away from the mob
and gaze into my suburban
backyard, searching and scanning.
I marvel at the splendor of this
early spring day. I see the grass
beginning to green, the white blooms
emerging on the apple tree.
I watch a solitary
squirrel scamper across the yard,
leap, and make
an effortless run straight
up the oak tree, defying
the laws of gravity and common sense.
I watch her skillfully navigate the tangled
web of leafless oak
and maple limbs in order
to find that perfect perch at least
thirty feet above the earth.
And there she remains, silent

and oblivious, living
in the now, while I smile
and gaze and think:
Oh, to be a squirrel.