

More Poems for Sixfold 7-15

Evanescence

Southwest
the Santa Anas ridge
green and brown beneath
the clouds' tectonic flow
into the blue western sky
enshrouding peaks
and sending skeins of
misty gray down canyons
up and out above the talus slopes
above the valley where
ten thousand homes and streets
evangelical churches,
schools and shopping malls
replace what once
were orange groves greening slopes.

Standing in the early morning sun
I'm pumping gas. I watch
as rainbows drift across
the mountains' face,
pale, evanescent, fading
then growing bright
as a million tiny raindrops
prism in the light.
They break out bands
of red, orange and yellow
bright against the slopes as
this last mist of spring turns
to vapor in the heights.

As I watch the rainbows come and go,
a mother and her little girl approach.
She sees the light as it begins to fade
grabs a hand and says,
"Look, Mom, look, a rainbow!"
Her mother, looking up,
says, "Hurry up, we're late,"
and bundles both

into their car and off.
I pay the price.
Then I too, am off,
ocean-ward to work.

Dawn Song

For my Mother

Caught,
bedazzled in bright dawn
by the sun's pale rays
in the shadows time spreads
around those days,
what is it that I praise?

The memory
in these middle years
of seasons shaped
by childhood's first tries,
of us together walking out
past white apartment blocks
to shop for some sweet prize.

It wasn't long
'til you stayed home
and watched while I went out
to the ice-cream store alone
for a nickel cone
of sherbet fresh and sweet.
I can taste it still,
in the sugar cones I relished
on melting summer days.

And this is the spirit song
inspired by those rays
the memory's reprise of all
I set against the tears shed
in darker times than those
of fears met by love and strength
by night-lights lit to shine against

the raging bears I saw
in nightmares when I slept;
and everything released itself
from serenity and shape.

I cried. You came.
with a quiet voice
to hold me in your certainty
that dawn would come
with sleep and time
to fix things in their place.

You built the frame of family
that I brace against these days;
Against the shock of towers dropped
into haunted deadly streets,
Against the nearing certainty
of that step into eternity
that looms beyond this praise.

We live our lives from day to day
though futures may look bleak
and memories, though dear,
may not be quite as right
as ice-cream cones to children are,
or dawns to those who wake.

But mother,
when the shades of night are rampaging
through graying palls of time
and certainty is lost,
The memory of your loving care
brings comfort as it shines.

Mountain Pastoral

For Fern

Along Sierra slopes
beside white cataracts
of mountain shattered spume
the river raises lady ferns
on rainbows, spray and sun.

And if we climb north slopes a ways

we find the shield or wood fern grows
amid decay and filtered light
by yellow pines, gray rock.

In brighter spots,
the spring-fed meadows, graze for deer,
there grows the green and powdered gold
of gold ferns curled like hair in sun;
while on the barren hillside there
rank bracken fills in burns.

Further up these slopes on rock,
parsley ferns break granite,
and bird's foot ferns grab sun from cliffs,
where none but goats can pluck them out
and eat themselves to death on what,
because of stems both stiff and sharp,
are poison ferns, no doubt.

Tollway to a Life Without

The news last night,
in this election year,
was of another bomb
in the sun, in a marketplace
far away in the East. It blasted
shards of metal through
a square full
of the bodies of men
and women and children
who fell, bloodied,
crying out in pain
from their injuries,
or from the injuries
and deaths of those they loved.
An American soldier died;
and some were wounded too--
burned and maimed
by the blast.

This story reminded me
of stories from Vietnam
that colored my youth

with images
of death brought home
through TV screens and news reports,
and by the Government's draft,
which threatened me
with a war I didn't believe
was worth the blood it cost.

I think of this as I drive
the 91 toward Fullerton to work.
As I drive I watch
A decrepit eighteen-wheeler
shedding a tire
that bumps and bangs the road until . . .
Boom! It explodes,
throwing chunks of rubber
up and out a hundred feet--
another aging retread
spreading its dreck across
the tollway's cracked concrete.

Such is the wrack
of business in America,
the detritus of trucks loaded
with the urgency of commerce,
of products made at home,
or bought abroad,
carried to Los Angeles,
perhaps, to ships in port,
or to airplanes bound
for Afghanistan,
or for some other distant place,

Some arbitrary place
in the imagination, perhaps,
like Vietnam was
a lifetime ago
on TV screens,
in magazines and newspapers,
everywhere we looked
when we looked
up from our everyday,
from the jobs
and things we wanted
for ourselves
and for those we cared about.

Those images remain,
embodied by the grizzled
Vietnam era vet
still stuck on the street,
homeless and dirty,
living a life of despair
in a land of freedom and wealth,
sitting beside his friend
a young man in his twenties
baring the stump
of his left leg--
blown off, I suppose,
on some dusty street
in a crowded marketplace
in the searing middle eastern sun
of some fanatic's
improvised explosive device,
or rocket propelled grenade,
where a dozen others died.

I turn my face away from them
as I drive
through the Southern California spring
remembering
the ashen gray
of bombs exploding,
of hillsides burned each fall,
now bursting out in greens
aflame with orange and yellows,
vermillion, blues and white,
alive again to rain on the slopes
and the napalm of
our righteousness
protecting us
from fright.

Simple as Day

Dawn's dusk,
obsession with wealth,
debt, what's left
of winter's wetness

drained from walkways
dried by sun drilling in
to wake the singular sense
of doom descending,
crows ascending
into what was once
ahead of us,
fallen now behind,
the smog that's come
to surround
this house of cards
we've built
from possibilities lost
and losing us,
what we've come to,
what has come to pass,
the loss of lust
for all those things
we left 'til later
roads, schools, music, art
now passed beyond us
what we've tossed
with little thought
the sunlight synergy
that we don't trust
those possibilities
of youth, of hope
that dawned sundrenched
in a new-borne day
in us become
days gone to rust,
lost.