

Sixfold Poetry Entries, April 2024

Words Matter

You matter.

Two small words

I never heard growing up.

Two words that seemed unimportant
until I said them to the right people; those
who hear them the least and need them the most.

You matter.

Kaitlyn wrote me a note
that said I saved her with those words.
Wilson says no one besides me ever said them
to him. Tacara
tries to beat me to it
and shout them as she enters
each morning, giggling
like she won some
game.

Demure Lexa
smirks, looks down,
offers me a hesitant half-hug
when I say them to her.

Esther
has yet to believe me.
Morgan may roll her eyes, shrug
and say 'I know,' but she walks away a little taller
than when she entered.

And Faith
just smiles, nods,
blinks back an almost-tear.

You matter.

Not a day goes by
without me saying them.
Two words I never heard growing up;
words like an absent wound I'm clinging to.
Words
that save me
every time I say them
to someone else.

Never Having You

If I had a child,
a little girl just like me,
she'd be all I wished I could have been.
She'd create
a world for weirdos,
a world where we belong,
then concoct her own religion
and worship, say, the dandelions.
She'd preach, she'd roar for all to hear
that sunshine weeds are what women should be praying to
...and also the bees
that pollinate them. My rambunctious
revolutionary would blaze an unbeaten barefoot path.
The bottoms of her feet

would be
dirt-encrusted,
rock-hard calloused.
Her tantrums would be taut strings,
but most days
she'd shine, she'd float
like the fireflies I'd cup in my hands.
I'd enjoy her glow for as long as I could,
and let her be
before setting her...
...free...
to light her own way
with her filthy feet and firefly
fervor; her weed-worshipping whimsy
and revolutionary
resolve.

Dear Daughter I never had,
You're somewhere in some dimension
at the edge of
everything
in the shadows
beside me, guarding
protecting, reminding me
of who I am when I'm too sad
to know; when I feel I may have lost
myself by never having you.

What Matters Most

She sat silent
in the back seat of my classroom
thin as a long-stemmed dandelion making light taps
with her pen between bursts of writing
sneaking a shy smile my way
when my eyes met hers
across the room.
When the bell rang, she put
what she wrote into the pile on my desk
before walking out,

and when I read her words,
I don't want to be here anymore
I'm never good enough. I just want to end it all.
I just want to end myself,
my heart thump-
thumped. I called for her
right away, and as she walked
down the long bright empty hallway,
I saw Jason, who cut himself *almost* deep enough,
then Kayla, who swallowed *almost* enough pills, then Lizzie,
who was found
hanging from the hotel rafters
almost soon enough to save.
This girl's face was a polite and nervous mask
of *I'm okay* with only a glimpse
of the pain she hid beneath.

With shaking hands,
I held up her paper, said *I care*,
and *I'm worried* and *You matter*, a short pep talk
I hoped would be enough to break through her poised façade,
her embarrassment and shame.
I hoped I was enough to make a difference.
I don't remember what else I said;
past the reds and blacks that flooded my sight,
past the terrifying thought of another death by suicide
I could have prevented.

She came to my class every day the next week,
and I greeted her every single day
with a smile and a nod, and then, more writing prompts.
More tapping her pen, more smiles exchanged,
and when she placed her assignment
on my desk, I read it right away.

*Dear Mrs. Morelli,
You saved my life. You're the only one
who noticed me, who noticed I was struggling,
who noticed I needed someone,
and for that
I'm so grateful for you.
You made me realize that someone
cares, so while this letter comes to an end,
please know it's because of you
that I won't bring my life to an end.*

One prompt. One look. One talk.
One moment I hoped and prayed was good enough;
a moment
when I hoped I would be enough
for this child. One moment made all the difference
and nothing, not observations or grades
or test scores will ever be
more rewarding than making a difference,
than helping a child believe
she matters.
That is what matters most.

Intuition

Mom's asking for you,
my sister had said, which I knew was impossible
since she'd already lost her speech.
She's on her way out, my brother'd said,
She's just waiting for you
to come one last time
before she takes her last breath.

I was too stupid to know
what they were saying
in the space between their words;
wanted to assume
this was some exaggerated guilt trip,
or maybe (the truth),
I just didn't want to admit
they might be right. I let days go by,
days filled with stacks of books, infinite cups of tea,
and a whole lot of avoidance,
believing that if I didn't see her,
she wouldn't die
and I could preserve my last memory of her,
vacuous but smiling last Christmas.
But finally, I went, something inside me
saying now, saying yes, saying it's time, saying
I'm ready.

She was curled in a ball
like I am when I sleep; looked peaceful,
her mind unbusy, unwavering,
unafraid.
Her eyes were jammed shut
against the hard reality
to which she'd succumbed, her body a prison,
her mind a prism
of who she once was,
of all she'd learned and loved and lost
leaking out,
grain by grain, from a broken hourglass,
each day, each month, each year going...going...gone.
Her small hands, knotted with veins,
clutched the threadbare blanket
tight to her chin as if to keep out the chill,
the nightmares; as if to hold on
to a sacred secret.
One moment, her skin was soft beneath my fingers,

mere moth wings;
the next,
smooth as stone
and just as cold as if... as if...
my siblings were right.

Body Radical

My body holds scars
that speak my truth, that tell
my story like the claw marks of a bear.
My body
says *Be human!*
Tell your story! Show your skin –
scar-thick. Coated with confidence. Coarse
with caution,
meant to be seen
like a neon sign, like a tank
on the battlefield.
My body
will not hide, forgotten,
neglected and desiccated, lest it crack
like the fragile eggshell
I no longer
am.

I never saw myself
as a radical, not like those from history
not until a writing prompt
forced the issue.
Radicals
are outcasts and misfits who think, who theorize
who question everything long after
they've outgrown those
precocious toddler
years.

Radicals are those
who never back down
when told they should be seen and not
heard. I am an outlier,
an outsider.
Quiet. Observing. Rejecting. I
am a non-conformist. A game-changer
who makes her own rules, who shirks the shoulds,
who thinks outside the box.
I'm a quiet leader,
oft-overlooked, who teaches
from her heart, not from the textbook.
I listen
to my gut and not
my supervisor. I swim against
the tide. I'm the pebble in the shoes

of those above me; the pebble that ripples
the stagnant pond,
that breaks the surface
of the lake of complacency. I
am the change I wish to see in the world.
I am my body's scars, my body's
history, my body's future.
I am body
radical.