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Garrett Doherty, Editor
Sixfold

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Dear Mr. Doherty:

I've submitted five recent poems for consideration in *Sixfold's* Winter 2021 Literary Contest. Included are *Need*, *The Puzzle*, *Love Poem (after Tommy Pico)*, *If I Could Explain It to You*, and *Mothers*. My poetry has been published in the Cimarron Review and Eclipse, among others.

Thank you for your time and consideration, and I look very forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,
Gillian Freebody

Professional Bio: A teacher of writing for 22 years, Gillian Freebody never tires of the riches life has to offer. As Simone Weil once said, "attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity." After a long hiatus from writing spent teaching and raising two children as a single mother by choice, Ms. Freebody is thrilled to discover her love of writing poetry again. It is through writing that she has rediscovered herself and the great "generosity" of poetry after many years of "sourcing out."

Need

The way your breath slips a step
when the email comes through
because his wife is at work
and he is out walking the dog in the dark
and you know he is thinking of you
so sends a message about reading *Into the Wild*
and neuroplasticity and the difficulty
of grading scientific writing objectively
and his daughter's crush on a transgender girl
and what does he tell her when
love is love and we carry our wounds
so close beneath the skin that a minor scrape
brings it all tumbling out in a swarm
of stinging bees and later, in your classroom,

when he tells you he has made his bed
and now has to sleep in it,
even if it means he is only tending to his own hive
for the kids, and you aren't listening because your heart has leapt
out of your body and is beating on the floor
at his feet before he steps on it
after lifting his sleeve to show you the anti-anxiety
bead-bracelet that he wanted to buy for you

but didn't

and you touch his wrist before thinking
and so you go on this way for a summer,
despite the unknown woman in his house,
engaging in the philosophical banter of Plato's Cave
and the liberty of nihilism that then moves on
to what it always does, what is a soulmate
and have your met yours and who have you taken to bed -
how many and would you do it again
and we are getting old and one person for the rest of your life
and dear God, how did we get here, in a suburbia we can't afford
with school-aged children and soccer practices
and ex-spouses or still-spouses and there you go.

She finds your emails when she trolls his computer
as any wife would and so he tells you *radio silence* -
she doesn't like the tone, and we are just colleagues,
and *Jesus*, so you say, *She's not wrong*,
because you believe in the golden rule
and forgiveness for mistakes made while still dreaming.

And then you don't plan to cry
when you send a message (years later) in this absurd way,
over a faceless screen with black letters in a tiny corner box
that alerts you with a ding - someone, somewhere,
saying something that may matter - or not -
and when he, the *King of Radio Silence*,
tells you he has to go, you understand the transparency of need -
its burden like the weight of a hard lead sky, so gray
in its winter waiting, you think of it snapping
like a moldy rug, dust kicking up
a riotous swell as you lay it over the back deck,
decide it needs a place in next week's
trash as the cold air of January
stings the tears that remind you
you are only Nietzsche's thinnest vein
on the wing of a moth caught in a lampshade,
drawn to your own death a million times over,
seduced by light and the slightest glimmer
of any kind of reciprocated human response.

The Puzzle

The small boy on the floor,
body curved like a snail
over a puzzle,
sighs at the task -

pieces scattered
like a restless sea at his feet,
tumbled from their box and meaningless
without each snaps-right-in
counterpart.

Start at the corners
my mother used to say
and work your way in

and he has - the top two
show sky as blue as a bird's egg
and the bottom has earthbound
bookends - green and rolling hills

that when filled in,
will start his feet itching to climb
all that reaches up
higher than any frame
can contain

but for now, he works at the edges -
the flat sides a good place
to begin - limit your options
and move to the heart of it

after all
where the fitting in
becomes more difficult, must be matched with colors
and lines, what intersects and connects
thrown into a jumble that must be right-sided
and manipulated to find its place,

and it tires him, the seemingly impossible
seams that run into each other like rivers
splitting into limitless tributaries
heading to the same unknown source,
emptying somewhere down the open road.

He puts his head down, his body spread like a map
across the loose pieces on the floor
and later, I find him sleeping, fetal-positioned among the
detritus of lost ambition - the scattered remains
of what fits so well together abandoned

but held fast in his clenched fists,
mountain ranges and sprawling oceans
grasped tightly in his tiny fingers,
wide-winged birds mid-flight
and sunset over endless hillsides,
locked firmly, even in sleep,
to be righted and arranged tomorrow

or the day after that.

Love Poem (after Tommy Pico)

I cannot write a love poem.
I cannot sleep with men.
I don't know the avalanche of orgasm,
and soon enough, the anger flame inside me
flares up and I want to smother
him with a frayed throw pillow
and then where would I be?

Old maid in the slammer
for killing love because it has a penis,
and then there's the body to deal with -
the smell, its obnoxious decay, that touch
on me I scrub and scrub but can't get clean.

Men are more than sperm donors
that idiot matchmaker told me
before I asked for a refund.
You're like some punk librarian -
you confuse men -
and I decide then that I hate women too -
the judgment, the take-off-your-glasses,
the *You're wearing that?*
after hours in front of the department store mirror,
the silent make-up artist
who refuses to laugh when I say
I really got in a fight - those impossible-to-cover
under-eye circles are battle scars -
she stares blankly as a dumb cow
and then air-brushes my face on her ipad.

Smile they say, as the camera flashes,
but *I can't see, you bitches,*
you took my glasses,
and now it's all gone to hell - I want to kill
you too, and your sub-contractors of superficiality,
and the refund you only paid half of,
you whore.

And so the scene replays itself
so many times -
the blurry bar, the fluorescent light
of the open refrigerator, the kitchen table
in my sister's house where I cry,
Why won't anyone love me?
after draining all the wine
from the neck of the bottle
in secret when no one was looking,
but that's ridiculous - the entire bottle
is empty and she and her new boyfriend -
the one she left her husband for?
shrug their shoulders, pat me on the head
and I drive home when I shouldn't -
a child asleep in the back seat.

And then let's say
I text a naked photo of myself
to my high school boyfriend still awake in CA
who finds me on Facebook - a self-proclaimed
lover of sex - but never with me -
whose picture plastered my adolescent bedroom walls -
and he responds immediately (only words then) -
You're so beautiful
after I have doctored the light,
messed with the filter,
used Photoshop till the blue light
of the phone blinds me in its post-
midnight haze.

I'm so excited
he texts,
and I feel not one goddamn thing -
my body in its miniature frame
one I do not recognize in the slightest -
only another I want to strangle and abandon
on the side of the road.

This is the love poem I would write.

If I Could Explain It to You

you are a boat unmoored
and trailing ropes, anchor severed
and left in the sand and silt
too deep to be seen or recovered

and no one comes
the storm is bad
raging into the night
so the sky stains red
the water silver in its mountain
swells and crests
there are no valleys here
just turbulence
without cease

and you have come to expect
the sickness
the silence
the empty cabin splintering
beneath the water's weight
frankly you are surprised
it took so long
to loosen each nail
from its board
each hook
from its ring

and then the raft is open
the horizon swallows you
and the surge of storm overhead
soaks even your thinnest skin
until you are exposed to the moonless
night, the slashes of lightning,
the massive darkening waves

and with each new dive
you think it will end
and when it does not,
you brace again to make it
to the top before crashing over
to do it again and again
before seeing any light
before recognizing that even now,
you are still holding on,
your hands balled in fists,
your shoulders squared to take
the next hit, your heart nearly
dead as you stare at the merciless
sea, but miraculously beating still,
keeping you afloat

Mothers

I admit, I do not know
how most women do it -

find the reserves of deep love
for both child and husband

I have failed miserably at one,
devoted my life to the other
without regret

and now there is daughter
there is son and a world
so filled with light,
I am stunned
every single sharp minute

I watch the trees
let go of their leaves

uncover their arms for each
new frozen sunrise

the horizon most mornings
is brushed with the same red-gold

tumbling from their limbs
and I wonder at this sharing of color

as if the loss of one becomes the birth
of the other and the trade-off

blooms into the beauty of these giant
root-heavy mothers

willing each year to strip
their branches bare

go out in a burst of flame
that ignites the sky

that holds up the earth
even at its most barren

that allows the sun
to wear its afternoon cloak

of lit silence, pools of rich light
illuminating each naked branch,
each gnarled trunk

aching with such stillness
such stark truth

I could lay down before them
and wait for it all to unfold

their quiet holding on
a vow I can believe