

They told us it would be the last dance

SIXFOLD COMPETITION
Fall 2019

They told us it would be the last dance
Five poems

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We have no words to name it

One thought or the other
a single micro motion or the whole
almost invisible separations
just this side of there.

A line so fine, so infinite
mind, eye, heart cannot find it even in sunlight
nor see the synaptic discharge of creation's doing.

If you can think it you've missed the stop
a line, a gate, a close encounter with the truth
we call it death.

Creation has no name
a breath simply settled along the separation
just this side of there
an electric shock in life's motion.

We like sharp corners
true, clear lines, defining moments
straight talk in our ears
we like it hard and fast and sure.

Oh, but that line
an ephemeral exhale of conception's twilight
a breeze of bird's wing high above breathable air,

That defining quality between here and there
where I am and not
where tomorrow and yesterday are wrapped in embrace,

Just this side of that gate of mind
is where we live for now
spoken into being until we find ourselves whispered
onto the other side of now
a line so fine, it is imperceptible forever.

Memoirs of a life

This 76 year old body is a mundane bible of an ordinary life with frayed edges, cracked spine, hand-crafted texts, beginning in gothic script, leading into common type.

Life writes itself on my body in furrows where the surface carries delicate lines running with the years.

Memories etch my shoulder blades with fine line drawings so graceful they hang in life's art gallery.

Stretch-marks of labor and creation blaze across the curves of my ass, tattooed with each death and birth of not only them but also me.

My ribs catalog the homes and places where I belonged without rhyme or reason, written in formless stanzas, punctuated by time.

My children, parents and teachers autographed glyphs of affection into my feet, sketched the ache of laughter into my legs, so relentlessly shared our hearts squeezed out tears of pleasure.

My first love's crossing the delicate border of death held the blade that razored my heart in two; my own weapons of change chiseled another fissure, hammering miles along my arm bones, marks lengthening into loss of my second love.

Grave marker typeface hides in the shadows of my chest, behind my breath, in preparation for when it is time.

No matter where my heady, some times questioning steps have landed, I leave sweat stained foot prints on the direction of my life, taking my long way home.

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Ow!

Being in love is a mad dog
Biting into tender skin
locking its jaw

Only, you're not the bulldog
You're that tender skin
Totally helpless to break free

I am old

I am an old woman
swaggering in the statement,
my meaning changing with each encounter
not by me, but you who stand in your own
notions and assumptions circling age
like dark clouds surrounding sunshine.

We are old
we who have grey, white, and purple hair,
who stoop or hold our bodies in rigid postures
moving along sidewalks and through hallways
independent, weak, strong, set hard, still
open to new versions of the story, opinionated, open
minded, educated, sheltered, ignorant and hip.

We are old, I tell you
you can never know the meaning years have down in
gut and memory banks, how pain becomes your familiar
because it's there and tells you so still are you.
The magic of age is camouflaged by wrinkles and aches
by slow reflex, texture of speech, the internal richness
unavailable to your sight.

I am old
you praise me as one who doesn't look my age
but I am still part of that decaying of age
and visage that fools you about your sense of what
it means to be limited by our body's diminishment,
to need help and patience, once given
cannot hide the challenge we cause in simply asking
and how tangled your movement through life becomes. We know this
in spite of how you turn back to us with kind words and helping gestures.

We are old
some really sick or not able, some still running
races at 103 - *she's not really running*, it is whispered.
A few need help and others refuse, we resist ripping
up our driver's license, fight to stay in our nests against
the pull of emergencies and staying engaged - you can never
know the ravishment of losses like those. You
have to get here my friend and let go into being old.

Love song to a moving target

He crosses my memory a dancing shadow flash
of man playing solo, says he likes that
disconnected feel of being rooted to himself.
A doer, he moves with talent in his bones,
caution in his eyes and vision in his voice
that speaks of futures unimagined to young men,
of possibilities beyond their fathers' dreams.

A dreamer, color of Mandinka warrior
quick tongued, urban cowboy,
this fragile human dressed in hero's clothes
for boys who are invisible until there's trouble; he will not
walk away from them, continues to pay a price so high
his ancestors sob within his dreams.
I've been in the bounty of his heart, held his ache of longing
for something just outside of thought, elusive, threatening
to crack the glass of white world pretend promises.

A shadow man, older now, a gambler against the odds for all
those boys, except himself who is still locked
in dingy limits given to his color. He's always been a threat to some
of rising into power, a game-changer who was feared,
warrior who wages change only for the
others who deserve it more than he, he fears.
But still there's hope, he holds his dreams pieced together
out of remembrances and remorse. They still hide
in him until he's brave enough to reach for gold.