

Redwood Writers Poetry Contest, Dec 2021

Honorable Mention Awards (listed in no significant order)

Dana Rodney

Wildfire Elegy

I used to think I could rely on the days
one following the other so faithfully
the innocent breath of morning
the folding petals of night
the years flowing by like rushing water

Nature's mood is generally predictable
except for the periodic cataclysm:
a meteor annihilating the dinosaurs
tectonic plates colliding
and depositing a mountain range
but you never think of a cataclysm interrupting
your own placid days
you never think
you
are the dinosaur

You never think about how
you are just carbon rearranged
something combustible
how everything you've collected in a lifetime
is just more fuel to a flame
that delicate painting of poppies

I hung on the wall wherever I lived
consumed as greedily
as a forgotten sock under my bed,
my mother's thumb-stained recipes,
a lover's penciled poem,
that nut-brown guitar that played a thousand
songs,
the carefully-tended jasmine,
my old cowboy boots still stained,
with the sweat of my youth,
even
my mother's ashes that rested on a shelf
now twice burned
mingle in the rubble.

Now I no longer belong to a place
the objects that housed my memories have
combusted
I alone am left to remember the things
when I thought the things would be left
to remember me.

Patrice Nelson

Cassandra

i.

An image rises, walled and still.
My city's towers glow:
wicks already burning.

My sight slides over it
like small clear shapes of rain
showing deaths of many sizes.

My own death—
bright to me.

ii.

Mist rotates like the cold stars,
like the white and circling sea:
A site where outcomes writhe.

I can see the war, the spoiled city,
the wet dirt where the fallen
will glitter like violets.

But no one listens when I speak.
Not soldiers, not the crying, folded girls
about to twist on shoulders.

iii.

Is my voice too high, too crowded?
Is it churning like a sky that tries
to utter all it knows at once:

Its wilderness of distance
the stuttered grief of birdsong,
the loneliness of knowledge.

Why must I go among the deaf—
those lovely, heedless, unwarned things
on their way to glow and die?

iv.

Is it always so, oh god of light,
that those about to fall
are cursed with disbelief?

God of sky, I cannot hold your gift:
your wheeling eye, the weight of it,
without its wing of distance.

Jo Ann Smith

PURPLE DUST

Sometimes I pray
not knowing if prayers
are anything more
than a sigh
carried by the wind
into nothing

before my life is over
will some omniscient narrator
whose eyes see light and dark
in their original colors
reveal the mysteries of life -
before, now and after

I have felt an untold presence,
but don't believe it's real
I have gathered at the river,
but never witnessed angels dancing
worshiped at the mountain
never reaching higher ground

so done am I
twisting in ambivalence -
my own tapestry
of rainbow-colored silk
drifting unspooled
in a blur of purple dust

so tired am I
travelling back and forth
on tumbledown terrain
across a bridge of my own mistakes
looking for the River Jordan
with its promise of deliverance

can it be enough
to cultivate a heart that beats
in rhythm with a universal pulse
and keep a steady grip
on the edge of this ancient rock
until with wonder I let it go