

Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream



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Marilyn Braendeholm

What Binds Us

The same couple walk by
my house each morning.

I don't their names.

A neighbour told me
they come from Portugal.

Another said they're from Spain.

Someone else thought that
Portugal was a city in Spain -
that person confessed that
they don't possess a passport.

Anyway, I'm usually gazing
across the street about the time
they walk by, idly occupied
with stirring milk into my coffee.

And this couple, they're always
holding hands, as if they're
tied together, like the binding
of a book, and without a binding
their story would fall apart.

I try not to think of being
without the man I love.
I try not to think about
how my story would fall apart
without a binding.

James Penha

Unfold

Since the day you unfolded yourself as if from
the womb
unwillingly or inviting me as some odd midwife
to intercede,
you stretched and stumbled not just to breathe
but to love
on your own feet. We are yet borne in each
other's arms.

Mary Belardi Erickson

Live

Live as a cat's cradle held
by a child's hands,
offered to you
to weave

between your own fingers,

joining you to the after
and the before
of your own life.

Your slender, nimble
hands

have transformed
into knobby branches
yet reaching toward
the same blue sky

while an innate pattern
of over and under
and through
repeats over and under

and through
the multiple dimensions
of living.

Mary Belardi Erickson

Down the Road

It was in walking a humble road
I felt most joined to you and earth.
As we strolled, I thought us away
from all the hubbub
in a serene piney countryside.

Now, as I brave my gravel drive
prairie wind blasts
like a sad memory into me.
My determined pace somehow
revives memory of us--
our young, interlocked hands.

You have gone on.
I am left, though, holding a sense
of what is important to remember
when all the noise has cleared
and it is just a simpler road--
the horizon and sky and a happier me.

Gilbert Honigfeld

End of the Line

Walking along a country road
I spotted a single strand of
overhead wire, a spur line
running to a stubby pole
in the center of a field once
cultivated but now growing
wild and weedy, a forgotten
powerline that'd run its
course, deadending in a
field along with a story
that'll never be retold.

Uncertain

A mountain poet
with a clear eye
and strong voice
wrote of topping
a cliff after a
hard climb then
looking down long
and hard, in kind
of a reverse telescopic
view,

and I was
uncertain whether he
meant the piece as
merely a well-crafted
bit of local imagery,
a metaphoric love song,
or an affirmation of
Life over Death re-
sisting the call of the
distant valley below.

Envy

The little old guy in the park
wearing an overweight camera
on a strap around his neck
stopped his slow stroll along the path
and raised his eyebrows in that
universal question mark, meaning
May I join you on the bench? I said
Sure, gesturing to the empty side.

I wouldn't call him a chatter-
box but he liked to talk more
than I'd expected, and one of his
stories was about a school chum
from way back then who'd taken
up camera work early in the old
flashbulb days, making a really good
living by his thirties in fashion
photography, placing photos in *Vogue*
and travelling the world, most re-
cently as the consort of a model
whose face you'd know if not her
name, and the guy never married,
he told me, with an unconscious
glance toward the chubby old lady
heading our way in sensible flats.

Ron Singer

A Walk in the Maine Woods

My wife told me about a walk she took yesterday. (Or was it the day before?)

“No wonder we believe in ghosts,” she said.

“These woods are full of ruined walls. To think what it took to build them! Every boulder had to be dislodged, then set in its place.

And this lawn...” (where we were sitting to catch the September sun, chatting, drinking coffee)!

“...the trees that had to be chopped down,
all the stumps, removed.”

“I know. And people have told me that when the farms failed, kids would come up here to scavenge, turning wagons into sleds.”

“No wonder these woods seem haunted!”

“At least, the ghosts in the house are benign.

This place is filled with Sevearns

(pronounced Sehv'-runce, our landlord's father)

“and Henry” (his son).

“There are so many stories around here.”

“Why don't you write them down?”

“You're the writer!”

Ron Singer

Across Two Fields (2018)

Peering down the lawn below our porch,
through the curtain of trees, and up the slope
across the field beside the other house,
at the verge of the boundary woods,
I spot my wife, completely protected
from tics by her old gray baseball cap,
plaid flannel shirt—green, red, blue, also old—
white socks tucked into black pants,
and hiking boots, brown.

She moves in and out of view,
picking berries, blue, rasp-, and black-.
The crop, this year, is lush, owing to both
the weather, and to cycles of growth,
about which I know next to nothing.
(It does seem odd that three berry cycles
should coincide.)

Watching for the picker,
as she moves from cluster to cluster,
I spot her, lose her, then spot her again.
Once, I mistake a stump for her bent form.
I keep my eyes on it (the stump),
to make sure it isn't moving.

And then,
still staring at the stump — presto! — I spot
her again, on the path leading down
from the woods, through the upper field,
and into the lower. I'm surprised by
how close she is, how large she looms.

Coming to rest at the foot of the porch,
she displays what she has garnered:
a full quart of blue, plus a smaller,
miscellaneous selection.
The quart, she'll freeze for a future pie.
With a smile, she silently extends
the second container, forgiving me
for not having helped.

I have a cold,
you see, which I nurse with rest and eating.
To the latter end, I scoop up a bunch,
and pop ten minutes' worth into my mouth.

Ruth Moon Kempher

Walking Together

as they have, over years —
parking the car — now
heading for home, letting

the market deliver. The one
who walks on the left
is deaf. The other's words

to her are as breeze. But
she knows where the car is.
And so, she leads.

Sylvia Manning

Again Is the Magic Word

for W.C.W. and some girl

Back in the early 80s,
not mine but the world's
when some women
living in a house I called my own
only some miles from Reynosa, Tamaulipas,
needed to cross the river for something
that doesn't come to mind,
something for a girl they knew

We went, in the rickety Monarch
my sisters made mine
as I'd had no car when my mother died.
We crossed in bright heat,
got that thing they wanted, whatever it was.

But then on return
the sky let a great waterfall of rain
down onto Reynosa. Narrow streets
full of cars filled with overflow
from canal, the one dug by hand,
finished just ten years back.

Cold water rushed our floorboards.
Cars stalled, blocked us.
Ours, too, nearly gave up, often,
but then began again each time
to let us get around those others,

newer, better, stronger, shinier ...
who knows how?

We made it through, shuddering
with the sudden cold and fear of stalling,
being stranded like so many were.
Somehow we made it back to the bridge,
higher. Then a drier quiet drive to the house.

Nothing special, that house.
No picket fence Americana.
No white shutters or such.
But we entered as guests who'd arrived
at behest of some angel.
(I was only visiting, after all.)

Did I think of my mother,
what she would have said?
How unlikely it might have seemed to her,
our making it through
the flooded streets of Reynosa
in her last car
before she herself made it through
to the other side. El otro lado.

Newer cars and higher didn't make it
but her Monarch did.
(Hers, really. Not mine.)

Sylvia Manning

Somewhere

with perfect light and cleanest water,
in the foothills of the Ozarks (I believe)

when my brother was less than three
and we still called him Tommy

my father for some reason had us with him,
somewhere in Arkansas to see his half-sister,
whose name was Willie Lee,
a resident for many years
of the sanitarium in Mena, for TB,

though he must have had other reasons,
this man, for getting out of Texas for a time,
that time,
besides seeing Winnie Lee or mountains,

and for taking us with him —
Mama and two sisters and me made us four,
besides them, Tommy and him.

I don't remember where we lived then or
even if we still adored him... but anyway,
it became for us a holiday.
We had some cheese and apples, travel cuisine,
and a camera using old 620 film.

Mama took two snapshots
(I disliked that silly word, even then.)
She knew to stand nearly in the stream
to get the younger children in his arms,
their next-older sister by his side,
on the light-mottled sloping bank.
She knew about box photography,
that where you took your stand
made the difference... if nothing of sociology
or why we tried to follow him around.

If I had known to ask,
"Are we of marginal class?"
she might have slapped my face.
Times had been that hard,
that underdeveloped.
(But she wouldn't have hit me for him to see.
In that one way he provided for me —
when he was with us, almost never now.)

I remember this photograph she created,
composed, risking appearing ridiculous
to passers-by on the road.
There was nothing snappy about it.
My brother seems normally beautiful,
child of three, if too serene, sitting that quietly
beside a sister younger than he —
and their father young, himself,
only thirty something, in white.

It was when he dressed in white, like Twain ...
when he talked against apartheid
(we called it segregation)...
when he still had hope
of helping heal the nation. But now he knew
he'd have to cure himself, as well.
You can tell he knows this,
perhaps just realized, in the photograph.

It was when we thought our brother
could grow out of it,
whatever kept him easy in a body's arms
in a place that begged a normal kid his age
to run and play, throw rocks,
chase the old man's thoughts away
until the right time came
to let them come another day.

But that time never came,
nor did Mama ever learn to say,
"We are bourgeoisie deshabillé,
if you must know."

Somewhere by a mountain stream near Mena,
going or coming from seeing Aunt Winnie Lee,
who died soon after, in surgery.

I don't think I could find the place,
even the photograph.
But my mother had the proof, all her life.
I wish we could have saved the negative.

Richard Spiegel

Near Maxwell's Farm, 1986

That summer Barbara
managed the Gaansevort
Street Farmers' Market.

This mother/son moment
was captured out of context
— paused in that brief excursion,
down the country road
with a double yellow line.

Mother and son, walked a road,
visited Maxwell's farm
and returned to the car.

From the city to the farm
and back to The Village market,
they moved the mind along the road;
followed by the lens inhaling light
and letting go a distant dream
that passed along the road

Our Geography of Poets

Bali

James Penha

Florida

Ruth Moon Kempher

New Jersey

Gilbert Honigfeld

Minnesota

Mary Belardi Erickson

New York

Ron Singer
Richard Spiegel

Texas

Sylvia Manning

West Sussex

Marilyn Braendeholm

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