

Courtney Sender

Moonshine

I.

The drunk man's wife called out
for help into a neighbor's night.
Her croaking voice leapt the hedge
next-door neighbors use to separate politely
one family's grass from another's.

Her words landed on the cold black
driveway and stuck there,
as if the asphalt were newly laid and sticky,
capturing flies by the light of sparklers
in soft red-white-and-blue fists.

The manicured daughter she sometimes watched
emerge barefoot from cars at midnight
saw the thin tongue unroll onto her porch.

It hovered before her, all tensed red muscle
and anticipation.

It looked purple in the dark.
She watched curiously, then let it
sink into the driveway.

When the drunk man died, his wife
had long been without memory.
She went to his funeral and cried
long and hard.

II.

There is a frog I miss
above the kitchen sink.
It used to hold my sponges,
until it decided to shed its porcelain
and leap from the windowsill
one quivering hour
after I fell asleep.

III.

He stands in a room full of calming things.
A loveseat. A piano. A painting
of the gray that seeps into corners.
He couldn't draw the blinds for long,
needing light to invent shadow.

He sighs as if night is eternal, seizing
the sky and the depths of the earth.
But even the sky has an end,
and the depths of the earth—
Why, that's only a few miles down.
You could walk it in four months
on land, no more eternal
than a pair of track shoes.

IV.

I never would have smashed
the figurine you gave me—
made in Mexico,
hand-painted,
deep blue and white,
scattered now across
five separate sidewalks
waiting calmly for
the municipal cleaners—
in the daylight.

V.

You weren't meant to see the day.
Shut your winking eye. Revive tonight.

VI.

She did it mostly to forget.
She rolled and thrashed,
rose, tiptoed to the kitchen, met
the silent grass, and crashed
into it. Her nightgown: wet
with starlight, china-splashed.
She dreams of sweat.

1st prize, 2009 Connecticut Poetry Prize
Judge Jack Bedell