

NEA BIG READ - Poetry Contest 1st place winner

Tulip Trees Below the Washington Monument in Baltimore

*What was said to the rose that made it open was said
to me here in my chest.*

Rumi, trans. Barks

The patience that holds
the twisted arms of the tulip tree
until it blooms in four hundred places
has settled in my deep breaths.

In the season of glory
you open me and I blush.
In the long passage of green
you make me rest in my own shade.

When renown drops like petals
I will remember I was beautiful.
The ghosts of blossoms
haunt my branches like youth.

It is you who make me flower in age,
bearing the ripe fruit of yearning.
I do not forget who I am,
perfectly intended.

(c) Stephen Hollaway

NEA BIG READ - Poetry Contest

2nd place winner

Grateful: a Cardiac Conversion

Give thanks for the 200-watt smile, from
the handsome doctor who waltzed into
my mother's cubicle to administer the right dose
of anesthesia, before the shock a cardiologist
would deliver by pressing a button to set things
right, convert her wayward heart rhythms back
to the steady 60 she needs, and has come
to expect from a daily regimen of chemical
regulators and the tiny box wired into her,
just below the left collar bone. *Cardiac conversion* -
so casually prescribed, when it seems
the real secret to how you navigate ninety
turns around the sun is not just all the miracles
of science, but a daily dose of gratitude:
for the sparrows at the feeder, or a cardinal
visitation with your morning coffee. And today
an unexpected blessing: recognition! That surge
of endorphins the moment her eyes radioed the heart,
nerves, brain –when Dr. Azam, who looked like
a young Omar Sharif, smiled and took her hand.

(c) Kathleen O'Toole

NEA BIG READ - Poetry Contest 3rd place winner

Yellow Talk

When life gives you lemons,
yell loud as you can:
free lemons!

Grant yourself a yes,
a yeah, and allow yourself
a slice of lemon in your water;
tap, distilled, spring, sparkling.

Perhaps gratitude is yellow.
Perhaps yellow is gratitude.

The dandelion whose head is now
two thousand possibilities
in the wind can tell you.

No mishaps, no mistake—
water is gratitude, gratitude is water.
Water with lemon,
gratitude on tap, distilled thanks,
spring regard, sparkling appreciation.

Give a child a lemonade
and they won't be thirsty for a day;
teach a child how to make lemonade
and they will make a stand.

If your lemon is a lemon is a lemon,
it's still more yellow than the sun.

And you can be assured
you won't go blind
staring at your lemon.

(c) Douglas Mowbray

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