

Three Poems by Gillian Wegener

Poem with a Stone on Top

Here's the mother, her cigarettes, her lipstick in her bag.
Here are the kids piling into the car. The car, powder blue and shiny.
It's a quick trip to town for one thing or another.
No one checks for the dog.
There is a thud, but no yelp. There was no time for that.
A quick end. Or that's how it's remembered.
One or more children and the blonde mother stand around the dog.
The mother is crying and cursing.
Forget the trip into town. Forget whatever was needed.
Death happens and then certain chores must be undertaken.
The mother, crying, tells the oldest child to take care of it.
The dog needs to be disposed of, to be buried.
It needs to be buried away from the other dogs,
 out of sight of the children.
The oldest takes his job seriously and contemplates
 the torn body of the dog.
The oldest takes the torn body out toward the trees.
He knows about the other dogs, what will happen if they dig up the body.
He decides, on his own, to burn the dog-body first.
 This makes sense to him.
Back at the house, the blonde mother blows her nose,
 doesn't look out the window,
while out near the trees, the oldest has the lighter fluid and the matches.
The smell of burning hair does not surprise him. The sizzle of meat does.
This takes longer than he expects. The smoke is black, then gray.
This takes all afternoon. The oldest is 12, so all afternoon is forever.
Back at the house, the younger kids eat crackers and watch TV.
The oldest has soot on his face. He is not unhappy, completing this task.
He's not unhappy even as he picks at the small blackened bones,
 hot to the touch.
He piles them in a hole he's dug. The bones are smaller
 than he'd have guessed.
The bones are piled in like jackstraws when he throws the dirt over them.
There are things you expect to happen: home, dinner, nightfall, sleep,
the oldest staring at the ceiling from his bed,
the neighborhood dogs doing their instinctual work.
One brings the bones back and places them on the mat at the door.

It's like a little supplications, if dogs can be supplicants.

A worshipping of relics.

It's like a little recrimination. As if the evidence
cannot be so easily vanished.

It's like a half-memory of a dream. The bones there on the mat
cannot be what they are.

But they are. There is some upset of course.

Now the bones will need to be reburied elsewhere.

And a stone will need to be placed on the grave. The oldest
is sent out to do this.

The mother, her blonde hair in her eyes, hoses down the mat by the door.

A stone will need to be placed on the grave to prevent further digging.

A stone will need to be found and placed to signify an end.

Being A Man

My brother speaks in a voice forced so deep our mother can't hear it.
He owns a truck. He owns some guns.
He rarely smiles and likes his steak with baked potato.
He likes to come to the rescue.
To my brother, education is a waste.
To my brother, the military provides solutions.
The father of two sons, he is proud.
He owns a large and obedient dog.
He wears jeans and he wears work boots.
He carries suspicion in his pocket like a badge.
Most days, he swallows his blood pressure pills with black coffee.
When he's happy, life's only half-bad.
My brother is rarely happy.
He tells each of his sons, "Be a man!"
He takes them to wrestling, to baseball.
And nights when the kids are at the ex's, he drinks a beer
 some detective show on t.v.,
 the t.v. on mute, the obedient dog
 at his feet, watching him and waiting.

Another lesson in the impermanence of all things

It was so cold last winter
that people could tromp out on the ice
of the Great Lakes in their scarves and boots
and go to ice caves that had not been accessible
or even in existence for years and years.
They took their children on their shoulders
or they held their mittened hands.
They walked carefully, mindful of the ice
beneath them, how ice can be fitful,
looking solid and cracking anyway,
but of course not believing that would happen now.
And the ice caves were worth the walk
in such cold for their crystal exuberance,
the way light seemed both bound and bounding,
the cathedral quality of reverence, of awe,
because even though everyone knew the physics
of it, everyone knew how these ice caves
came to be, no one could really understand
how such beauty can exist only sometimes
and then only to melt away.

Gillian Wegener has had poetry published *Spillway*, *Packinhouse Review*, *Sow's Ear*, and *Wherewithal*. Her chapbook *Lifting One Foot, Lifting the Other* was published by In the Grove Press in 2001, and her first full-length collection of poetry, *The Opposite of Clairvoyance* was published in 2008 by Sixteen Rivers Press. She hosts the monthly 2nd Tuesday Reading Series in downtown Modesto, is founding president of the Modesto-Stanislaus Poetry Center, and has served since 2012 as the poet laureate for the City of Modesto.