

Select Poems

Sweeping

Loretta Walker

This is second generation dirt.
A quiet interloper who stole
through Mama's windows,
smuggled in his family one grain at a time,
and camped on her curtains, baseboards,
and underneath the toupee of red carpet.
For hours, I sweep thirty years of rouge grains,
sift through kitchen and bathroom cabinets
and stashes of costume jewelry.
Fatigue slows my pace, opens my eyes.
I find a harem of butterflies as great as King Solomon's.
Each room is a haven
for these metal, plastic, and glass beauties.

I am in the kitchen where a dynasty of monarchs
alight on yellow canisters, dishtowels, wall hangings.
I wrap them in newspaper with the dust
still covering them like soft skin.
My mother loves these nectar-feeding insects
as though she is one.
But age and illness have made her a chrysalis.
She pumps life through her wings with a new cane,
slowly shedding her wheelchair and walker.
When she lifts them to fly, I will have returned
this swept dirt back to the earth—praying
today is not the day diabetes will do the same to her.

Old Books

John Grey

I donate my old books
to a homeless shelter.
Will those without a roof of their own
really find comfort
in the Karamazov brothers
plotting to kill their father?
What about something light—
does anyone read Thorne Smith anymore?
Let's just drop him through the slot and see.
Mysteries, I can see being helpful—
crime resolved, perfect ending.
Of course, in the shelter,
nothing resolved, nothing's perfect,
and who knows how it will all end.
Well, at least they can imagine, can't they?
And imagination is the business
that books are in.
I get rid of old books
to make way for new books.
The heads of strangers
are like shelves to fill.

Influx

Octavio Quintanilla

Too much killing
south of the border, the heavy rains
make it easier for bodies to disappear.
And so,
the dead come from Argentina, El Salvador, and Mexico,
as if looking for a new start.
But we know better.
Some drift quietly to our porches or get stuck
between the branches of mesquites.
Others find their way into our cars, grin
behind the steering wheel
as if relieved to finally get home.
It's a common sight and no one bothers them.
Their foreheads have a gunshot wound or a message.
Eventually, the water will return to where it came
and we'll see the tops of hills.
We'll see clouds, small birds, and maybe we'll even see
a small plane lose itself
in the folds of the sky.

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A Man and His Dogs

Octavio Quintanilla

This morning
the man who died two years ago
was feeding his dogs.
He was patient and the smaller pup
came up and licked his hand.

I called out to him as you slept.
He came to my window, his dogs
followed him, wagging their tongues with joy,
rubbing their fur coats against his legs.

When you opened your eyes, I wanted
to tell you that getting lost is possibility.
Tell you, from now on if I say sadness
it means I am driving and I know
exactly where I am going.

I began to tell you, "Do you remember
the man who lived..." Then I stopped
when I saw you stretch your body with a yawn
as if announcing to the world
you had just been born.

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