

Off The Path

The poet's sleight of hand is rooted
in secrets discovered and truths
unearthed, a gift given one autumn
afternoon when father and son,
traipsing in a forest come across
a fallen tree rotted and waiting
to be rolled. Together they uncover
the loamy decay, breathe the breath
of humid soil, and there, a boy's eyes
spy a green and glistening salamander.
It lingers, just long enough, perhaps
knowing the metaphor it will become,
60 years later, today.

Digging Along a Path

The truth is there,
unyielding. Beneath
a chainmail of
spidery roots and
hidden within
an earthen cellar
of clay clung stones,
it resists.

Gloved hands
will not expose
its buried worth
nor wrest it from
the cloying earth.

No.

The truth must be
nakedly sought. Its
freedom bought
with beads of sweat
and salted tears
of introspection.

The truth is there
but only the bare
skin of yearning and
the soil-blackened
nails of necessity
can dig it up,
can pry if free
can separate it
from the loam.

Once unearthed, though, and within a poem
it purifies the prose and, alone, to the poet,
provides absolution.

The Path Traversed

No small matter the school crossing guard
vested in yellow straps and wrinkled black
skin, a placard in hand, she ushers her charges
from sidewalk to sidewalk, safety and smiles
in equal measure, fully aware the treasures
of this town are, day by day and certainly
now while I await the nod to proceed, hers
for a moment, before bells peal, the once
unnoticed shepherd of Wyoming Avenue.

Keeping Time (In Memory of Sarah Hannah)

The watchmaker, stooped at his
bench and loupe in place, attends
creation knowing the face of each
timepiece is ordained an unknown
number of ticks.

Neither care nor repair will stay
its final clockwise notch. No
alloyed springs or immaculate
cogs, no beveled jewels or karats
in the gold hold sway over that
destiny, that inevitable demise,
only noticed when time stops.

We though, note our days
aware that each heartbeat
propels us on paths uncertain
but certain never not to repeat.
We gorge ourselves on experience
and vouchsafe our memories,
entrusting that heirs and theirs,
will not too quickly allow
our descent into obscurity.

Those of us who dispossess
the priests and prophets who
profess that mortal flesh shall pass
into heavenly ash and dust,
rather trust the poet's metered
watch whose clicks of clocks
are counted until breaths come
to naught and thought becomes
energy released into stardust.

The Gift

An unremarkable seed,
selected by small hands
and by chance embedded
between paper and glass,
moistened daily by the faith
of a curious child, rewards
his ministrations with root
and leaf, an embryo to be
nurtured in the earthy womb
of a red clay pot atop that
windowsill needing paint
but awash in the morning
light of a sun-bathed room.

Billions of photons later,
a survivor of spider mites, fungi
and inexpert repottings,
a grapefruit tree armed
with warrior's spikes, spans
a kitchen, daring those bearing
shears and sinister notions
to prune a single branch.

This tree holds the history
of a grandfather's rooted will,
it is emblem and proof that love
will be the photosynthesis of life,
that love transcends, that
love begets and bears fruit,
and when in fall the DNA
of soil and stem condemns
the eldest leaves, yellow and
desiccated, to be shed, it does
so absent dread, it does, so that
the newest leaves, coursing
with chlorophylled veins, may
thrive, and so too, that a young
man's eyes in spring will spy
those five-petalled clusters ablaze
and alive with pollen, beckoning
the breeding bees, and reminding
him of the wonders of it all.