

Jodie Buller – MoNA Poetry Symposium Poems

Layered In

The grave carved out of the forest floor
with dig bar, shovel, and pick,
with care and sweat,
is nestled in a community of oak and ponderosa pine.

We pay attention before we begin,
respecting the hidden network of roots
that connect them in a web layer one foot deep in earth,
weaving all these trees together.

Two feet further down and the earth becomes basalt
from layers of lava flows, 15-5 million years ago.
10 million years of lava _ 6,000 feet thick
during an age before any distant Homo Genus ancestor
we could name or place.

But we can trace the quartzite and rhyolite stones that emerge from this soil
back to their faraway mountains, carried here in the flow of ancient
river trajectories,
layered in.

A human lifespan is its own arc,
and we measure each moment of time and feel its passage keenly.
And grieve when a spark of life goes out,
as though some part of us is also extinguished,
or grieve by shining more light with our love,
to keep their memory alive in us and in the world.

The grave –
lined in oak leaves, pine needles, lichen
dressed with elecampane, calendula, sunflowers,
strawberries
becomes a nest
to hold the shape
that lifespan embodied.

And the people who grieve
come into the web of trees
and lay that form into the earth,
cover it with handfuls of duff
and shovels of dirt and rock,
and slowly the grave becomes a mound.

Our newest ancestor, layered in.

How long it takes to say goodbye

Acres of space fathoms of sea so many hugs
One beloved auntie of mine
who announces herself to newcomers as a queen of hugs –
made mention of this the other night during my mother's birthday celebration.
She asked me directly, to write a poem about how long it takes -
Mom had gathered her people from across lives and places,
and they took to each other immediately
meeting new kindred in their 70s – I saw the air above the table ignite,
I watched their minds light up in curiosity, connecting –

made all the more beautiful
as each of them are grappling with endings:
their shoulders, their feet,
their long relationships coming to the last bends
of lifespan, and in response they open, tending to love.

How long it takes is an observation,
not a question or a judgement -
a blessing.

There is pain and poignancy in following the threads
back through the bloodlines –
the jungle of grief is vast and lifelong
and I suspect its purpose is to crack open our capacity to feel,
but we lost that, along the way – un-eldered and un-modeled.

Their parents were quiet on all of this, children of the great depression
and coming of age during war,
and Their parents muted by the war before that –
they submitted to the deep need to get back to normal, to find some comfort.
Fresh off the horror, they committed to erasing it from their tongues
and these children,
this generation's grandparents,
were raised in those homes.
The frostbite of love at arms' length – their parents.

Now - I watch them cracking open new intimacies of being,
being there for each other,
being real, and I see elders being forged.
They do not know it,

as they joke about not being able to count on themselves any longer,
needing each other more than ever, but they are luminous in this –
tempered in kindness.

“Tough and tender” –

This is the toast my 2nd dad gave to my mother that day,
his eyes welled up and his voice cracked with gratitude –
the last six weeks a wheel of walks and pills and naps and meals,
healing from surgery, his sternum cracked in two
his huge heart in trouble
and my mother so graceful,
so transcended into a state of gratefulness and present wonder,
blissed out on dahlias, sweet peas, nasturtiums, hydrangeas, ferns.

I am beginning to learn how to resonate with this witnessing,
to allow her to teach me
this willingness to be moved, to be enjoyed, in gratitude.

My old resistance is wearing thin -
so much is so hard
and this is soft medicine.

It takes as long again to say goodbye as it did to get here,
generations ringing in our ears, all the love we have
to bring to the table,
a feast of small offerings, witness, and harvest.

The reckoning and recognizing
in each momentous ordinary moment.