

Today the poems walked out,
out of the universities, out
into the streets of gentrified C.D.,
rainbowed Capitol Hill
tidy Ballard, and the unbound Av.,
shelters for the battered and streetworn
rest homes where elders are trapped
in front of nonstop tv,
psych wards where the soul journey
is rammed into 4-point restraints
the jail house where we punish
the ones we have failed.
The poems walked out, walked
out of the prison of ego
out of the tyranny of hip
into the labor room
the delivery room
the abortion room
where we decide
when to say NO—here—?—
or in the battlefield

when they grow up

if they grow up.

Girl children boy children

bombs do not discriminate

skin of all colors

tears in strips

and poems contain them.

If they're not in the poems,

the poems will find them

hidden in the musty attic

the dank cellar

or the new condo

with the lakefront deck.

The poems want to rollercoaster--or glide--

in the open daylight

with Basho, Ferlinghetti, Amichai, Rumi,

Whitman, Oliver., Lorde, Sanchez.

Sometimes the poems scream

though no one hears in Washington D.C.

where they live inside limericks

built with tongue-twisters.

Sometimes someone listens

and paints a new vision

on the walls of our lives,
outside the high offices
of business tycoons who own
the country, the rich
with their estates and villas
built with funds stolen from the poor.
Yes, let the poems take you
where they want to dance
drunk with the joy and pain
of the human story,
not in a safe room
with an antiseptic persona
and gleaming plastic.
Have you noticed how
sometimes the poems sit down beside you
in the drunk tank, the park bench,
the staircase in low rent housing.
Sometimes the poems walk down
the long hospital corridors
and pause beside the beds
where patients lie, alone in the night,
waiting for the next pill,
waiting for the next painfree breath,

waiting for the Goddess of Mercy in blue silk kimono

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or the Goddess of Death in tattered jeans

The poems wait too, with their late-night gifts:

the rose of peace,

sips of melting Rainier Mountain snow,

the rolling music of ocean waves

a late winter promise of crocus,

the fragrance of cedar and sky

on the summer blue wings of birds.

Follow the poems to the patient's bedside

for you are the patient

and listen while the poems

whisper love, whisper light, whisper Om.

—Pasha Joyce Gertler
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