

S. Erin Batiste

Interdisciplinary Poet & Storyteller, *Glory to All Fleeting Things* | latest Chapbook

The Yellow Jackets

after Natasha Trethewey

The yellow jackets have returned. Each morning since May
I've awakened to their black and neon limbs building a nest.

Stung by childhood memory, I set out to sabotage their attempts:
use sticks, hoses, poisonous sprays but my drugstore weapons

are not enough to keep them from hovering above my awning at dawn.
My landlord intervenes, says they have never been this persistent,

insists my sweetness draws them here this season. I shake my head,
knowing the wasps and I are a kind of honeyless colony.

The oaks and palms grip Pasadena sidewalks, sluggish with the last
of summer when all traces of the muddy dens disappear.

Their departure reminds me of my own parents, who spent a decade
trying to make a family. How nothing stuck: the glassy condos

that confettied the Pacific coastline, the Spanish duplexes in Los Angeles.
Seattle, San Diego, Tucson, Tempe, Burlingame. The Spokane bungalow

reduced to ash and snow. I picture the wasps sweeping sunrise in cursive,
they treaded air for weeks determined to shelter their young.

My parents' failures took years. But they gave up and vanished too,
leaving me to search for papery wings scattered in the Santa Ana

winds, which simmer like an oven cradling dinner, finally call me home.

At Trader Joe's in South Pasadena

for Zelma Lee

*What America did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and you got
out on a smoking bank and stood watching the boat disappear on the black waters of Lethe?*

~Allen Ginsberg

With Safeway and Southern Avenue decades behind me, dear
grandmother, I search for you in aisles of Trader Joe's instead.

As I pause to savor chipotle smoked salmon and sample
a polite slice of plum, I swish the summery white around

and wonder, would you scoff at their under seasoned hand-
outs too prideful to sip free offerings in communion cups.

Would you ponder the entire countries pre-cooked and pack-
aged into colorful plastics. Would the bottled up beauty, curds

and curried simmer sauces shimmering in mason jars perplex
your syrupy Texas tongue. Would your Sunday dress you'd

saved for shopping shame you now, fail in the shadows of
the thin, bleached teathed, blonde ladies clad in Lululemon

athleisure, armed with affirmations and mantras of the day.
Would you think them no different than the doctor's wife

you'd cut down from a chandelier as a maid. This is what
you learned white women to be: Free to string themselves

from crystal nooses. Whose paler lives the golden age deemed
worthy of being served and saved in silence, while you prayed

away hollers from u-turned pickup trucks each time your dusk
bus was delayed. Would the shoppers' faces mirror those rear-

views, make you hurried, worried this is a sundown town too.
At checkout my cashier appraises me in smiles, approves my

weekly organics, fair trade coffee, wine. Would you'd dreamed
in all your colored days this sanguine white girl working for me

instead now. Exiting, I glimpse your high cheekbone reflection
shining back in the sliding glass and as I step outside to catch

sunset, swear I hear humming this little light of mine, let it shine,
let it shine; our silhouettes swallowed under a marmaladed sky.

Patrycja Humienik

I'm a Polish-American writer & performance artist based in Seattle

anchor baby

i keep close the intonation of my name
spoken in my mother's voice. there was a time
i let people mispronounce it. i don't

remember the sound of my grandfather's voice. i've lost
the word for the flower i could be, impatient
blossom, used to never wear lipstick, now i smear

shades of azalea on my lips, i kiss everything, i leave
a mark. invocation. as in: a prayer i want
to repeat. the physicality of it: prayer, kissing, echoes

of a younger me. trying to be approved of.
i'm not saying i am better now. i look up how to say
anchor in my first language. once i didn't need

to search. kotwica. my mama gave birth to me
a month after my parents arrived in the states.
nie mówiła wtedy po angielsku. it was

her first time on a plane. i know nothing
of ground, of letting the ship sleep.
i fly for hours to visit. if i could

bind myself to a place, put cut flowers in a vase,
i would thank my mother that way. instead
i pour the petals out.

porous

east of the city i find dolomite. its crystals wear curved faces
stretched long by the years, my desire
not unlike a rock like this: also crystal, porous, this weight,

not a rock you can depend on
to keep its form. welcoming water,
room for error, can i soften

the bolt in this poem. my jaw
a buckle fastening tight: sit
still, stay put, shut up.

the past a spiral staircase i climb, bending over the railing to shout into the
middle

The Auction

I woke up this morning with seagulls encased inside me.

And I said, “Here, this is what I have to offer.”

The seagulls preened and prodded, and you said, “Do you have anything for sale?”

And I said, “Here, take these seagulls, they’re inside me.”

You looked at the skin encasing them as the seagulls preened and prodded. And

you said, “How will you set them free for me?”

And I said, “I will run them out through my knees.” And the seagulls preened and

prodded because they knew they were for sale.

And you said, “I am not too fond of knees. I am a little too consumed in your

wrists.”

The poems attached belong to S. Erin Batiste, Patrycja Humienik, and Abi Pollokoff respectively. Please visit the Jack Straw website to learn more about this fascinating program.
<http://www.jackstraw.org/programs/writers/WritersForum/index.html#wp21>