

## **Donna M. Davis – Three Poems**

### **The Old Well**

My cousin Johnny wanted to go adventuring,  
down a dirt road to the abandoned well.  
Aunt Mary's farmhouse was a half mile away,  
past fields where we dug potatoes,  
stole them from their dusky wombs,  
slit their skins with jackknives,  
uncovered flesh that glistened  
like a crescent moon.  
The well was up a hill, beyond the cow barn  
and the empty, ramshackle pigsty.  
We climbed fences, their wires rusted,  
wooden posts rotted, connecting pastures  
overgrown with mustard weed and purple thistle.  
"Don't you ever go there," Aunt Mary had warned.  
"You could fall in and break your necks,  
and if you survive, your screams will never be heard."  
I thought about its walls swallowing me,  
how impossible to climb up from the bottom,  
to move my knees and feet along slippery crevices,  
to see only tattered shreds of clouds  
and a sky the shade of robin eggs  
before they crack open on the ground,  
their blue shells cupping pale yolks.  
When Johnny and I reached the well, the ground was wet,  
and all we saw was a hole with broken bricks at its crest.  
I didn't dare peer down into its depths.  
I only recall a kaleidoscope of yellow swallowtails,  
and how they swept a circle of light over its muddy lip.

### **Barry's Tale**

Barry was the smallest guy  
in our college dorm.  
He slept with two cats on his chest,  
and snored all night.  
Being awake was difficult for him.  
The Mellarill he took nearly made him a zombie.  
Barry walked slowly to class in the snow,  
wearing cracked leather shoes without socks,  
but he held his own in Chinese Lit.  
He knew a lot about the Tang Dynasty,  
and the concubines sequestered in lavish houses,  
who made love to ghost consorts,

their masters absent for months.  
They were schooled in the art of seduction,  
the way to paint eyebrows  
that seemed to float like blackbirds  
over white-powdered eyelids,  
the way to wrap a sash around hips  
and pluck the strings of a pear-shaped lute.  
At night, Barry wore a silk dragon robe,  
instead of cotton pajamas.  
He would wander through our suite  
pretending he was a crane,  
stand on one leg, sometimes for hours,  
while he read stories to himself  
about the exquisite Empress Wu Zetian.  
Then one day he was gone.  
We learned he'd stopped taking the meds  
and was hospitalized in a locked ward.  
A few of us, who gave a damn, visited him.  
He was on some new pill,  
pacing back and forth in his room,  
talking faster than usual, but lucid enough  
to ask me what I feared the most.  
I told him how I dreaded being alone  
and losing everything I had.  
That's when he wrapped himself  
in his silk dragon robe  
and wagged a finger at me,  
reading scribbled words off  
a sheet of lined paper:  
"You can't hold on to things.  
The earth revolves, and they fall away.  
A courtesan stares out windows  
across secluded gardens,  
but the wayward lover  
never returns."

## **Dark Road**

I've often wondered  
where a dark road leads,  
when crazed tree limbs cast shapes  
against the racing moon,  
and drivers speed to chase stars  
around the next turn.  
The road is always there,  
linking one place to another,

across thousands of miles.  
Along the hairpin bends  
of "13 Curves," it brings  
a bride in a bloody wedding gown  
killed when her groom  
veered into Onondaga Creek.  
She appears at twilight  
crying bitterly, a lantern in her hand.  
An unwary driver stops to help,  
then watches her form fade,  
her lace sleeves empty of life.  
He counts the curves back to one.  
His hands, a fragile prayer for dawn,  
clasp the steering wheel.

More than five states away,  
on Goatman's Bridge,  
travelers glimpse the spectre  
of a black goat farmer  
lynched below the railing.  
They pass the fields  
where Klansman burned his house  
and slaughtered his family.  
Legend says his corpse disappeared  
after the killers let it hang for days.  
One murderer choked to death  
while eating dinner.  
Two later fell from the bridge  
and died in orange mist.  
Another perished from fever,  
hallucinating the dead man's spirit.  
The bridge had loomed  
in their nightmares,  
the nexus of good and evil,  
the present and the past,  
distant stars shining on its girders,  
the mystery of where  
a dark road leads.

**Donna M. Davis** lives in the Central New York region. She is a former English teacher who currently owns a small design business. Her poetry has appeared in *Slipstream*, *Review*, *The Comstock Review*, *Pudding Magazine*, *The Centrifugal Eye*, *Carcinogenic Poetry*, *Aberration Labyrinth*, *Third Wednesday*, *Red Fez*, *Poecology*, *Red River Review*, *Ilya's Honey*, *Gingerbread House*, *Oddball Magazine*, *The Milo Review*, *Halcyon Days Magazine*, *Burningwood Literary* and others. She was a special merit winner and finalist in several of *The Comstock Review's* national awards contests.