



Mary Bonina—Five Poems

All Washed Up

At our feet, odds and ends of someone's home
washed up: two by fours, plus what I think
is a runner from a porch rocking chair—maybe
the owner liked to sit and watch the sun go down.

The whole house might have been taken
into the sea in a storm. Leftovers from dinner
plates: chips off everyday Blue Willow,
delicate bone—the good china— and pieces
of pottery, handmade on a wheel.

Machias, meaning *Bad Little Falls*,
also has its necks and coves, bluffs and bends—
and Maine's a rocky coast with a grey sea sometimes.
At the diner for breakfast, the fisherman's wife,
when asked "How's it going?" answered only
"Straight ahead."

The tide brings in bits and pieces and waves
crash against the muddy strand and then
withdraw in a rattle, because
the ocean floor is a bed
of small, perfect stones.

Vertigo

Imagining myself where
my husband and son and others
are picking along the shale
crusted over with periwinkles.

I watch as they stoop
to look at lines drawn
in patches of sand between
rocks—the roads snails made.

Poking around in tide pools
with fallen pine boughs, they find
starfish, dwarf crab, razor clam.

Be careful, I don't say aloud,
knowing how much
they resist my worry.
But I am afraid they could fall

unable to forget we all will.
I don't trust myself
so I won't go there,
though the rocks are flat,

steppes above the deep blue Atlantic
just begging for climbers,
a gradual plateau letting you
get close enough to feel the rush

you swallow teasing the tide
to come after you.

Morning Commute (for Gianni)

Sleepy boy in the passenger seat
my charge my joy my sidekick

oh look how the coyote considers
crossing the boulevard to the river

how at the cemetery gate
a wild turkey sneaks an exit

remember always the day of the heron
a Great Blue appearing in front of us

no one walking no other cars
just ours heading over the hillcrest

and there it was my god
a god!

so graceful huge slow to move
lifting up with fan wings

each the size of you taking flight
across the outbound lane.

Weather

I thought it would rain
the day we buried father,
but, no: bright June sun.

Instead, it rained the day
my sister married,
the couple not facing

spring rain you'd accept,
but for them—a torrent
coming down to drown

tiny white lilies held tight
in her fist, and her dress looks
muddy in the wedding photos.

Each usher was trying to offer
shelter under large black umbrellas
like awnings above their heads,

as they went up the church steps
to enter the doorway to what
my sister thought was a dream

Her life has been nothing like a dream
The umbrellas were the kind
funeral directors kept waiting

in the wings that other day,
just in case the sun didn't shine
when we buried our father,

tossed the flowers people
sent—into the big gap. There
was the priest throwing down

matted earth along with words
we couldn't understand then.
I tossed an open red tulip

big as a teacup, its stem
turning into clown flower,
collapsing before I let go.

Dominica Wisdom

Bonte, a gardener, burns brush
all day, every day, stokes a smoky fire:
leaves, fronds, shoots
could become trees for the canopy.

Even tin shacks don't block
vegetation from finding a way in.
It enters through windows and
doors that must be kept open
in the sweltering heat of day.

*We are not the rivers and the streams.
We have to leave them some day,
Bonte says to me.*

He cuts ginger I can take home,
along with my new orchid heart.
He tells me he knows

a way to hide the roots, *put them
in pairs of dirty socks, keep them
from the Customs man, bring them
home as souvenirs.*

Mary Bonina's new memoir *My Father's Eyes* has just been published by Cervena Barva press, which also published her previous two collections of poetry, *Clear Eye Tea* (2010) and *Living Proof*. (2007) She is also the author of *Lunch in Chinatown*, a chapbook of poems inspired by the experience of teaching the English language to recent immigrants in their work places. Her poetry and prose has been featured in *Gulf Steam*, *Salamander*, *Hanging Loose*, *English Journal*, and in many other journals and several anthologies. Her poetry most recently appeared in *Entering the Real World: VCCA Poets on Mt. San Angelo*, celebrating forty years of the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and her personal essay on the late poet Christopher Gilbert and his community of poets in Worcester in the 1970s appeared in the *Worcester Review* (2013). Commissioned by composer Paul Sayed, she wrote a suite of three poems, *Grace in the Wind*, and Sayed's composition for piano, cello, and soprano voice inspired by her work had its world premiere at the Longy School of Music of Bard College, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in November of 2012. Bonina is a graduate of the M.F.A. Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College. In addition to being a Virginia Center for the Arts Fellow, since 2001 when she was named the finalist for the Goldfarb Fellowship in non-fiction, based on her submission of chapters of her memoir, she also serves on the Board of Directors and is a member of the Writers' Room of Boston, Inc. She is working on a novel and a new collection of poetry. She lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts with her husband, poet Mark Pawlak and their son, Gianni Bonina-Pawlak.