

T. Michael Sullivan – Two Poems

Tuning

I.

The first hushed drops
Of a ten-day rain
Danced on the cottage roof
As Beethoven receded.
The wind scorned mercy
And hung on our shoulders.
A mad sea tumbled,
Coughed kelp and stones
To clear its gurgling throat.
I read Shakespeare and dreamed
Of mid-summer mirth.

II.

As I descended from mountains,
my father entered the hospital.
On a mid-summer morning
He twisted across a bed
In nausea and clutched
His side in pain
Undiagnosed while he wheezed
Toward death on the slack side
Of my childhood hill where I heard
The relayed calls of women
Announcing dinner.

III.

All summer the ocean ripped,
Tearing at the embanked sand.
Long swells rolled over fish-scaled
Sand bars, ran out between them.

Early one evening three sleek boats
Trolled for death beyond the rip
And outside break, fished two bodies
For the day's catch and funeral.

After the official excuses, vehicles
Prowled the flats and rips and breaks
To keep those who would poach
Death at bay.

IV.

On a northern lake
I dig my knuckles into sand
And slip a kayak onto water
Dazed by the slant of late-afternoon sun.
I paddle past a lone loon
Voiceless and still, clear
Rocks with the whispered breath
My father skirted death.

The summer's single heron
Wobbles through a thick-tongued
Drunken fog in a stuffed coastal marsh
And my father hobbles from the hospital.

In another season
All will tune again
To the cry of a loon
The pitch of an oboe,
The swell of a spring tide.
Then all will pause, skitter
and skip into song.

Reimagining Spring

What hope lies in the snow
falling outside my window
and cloaking the ground
to break an already broken
record as the sun now
crosses the earth's divide?

A vernal agnostic, now my doubt
is confirmed, my hope chilled.
The evidence, once only bleak,
is now bone-boring.
Spring, hailed as sporty and sly,
seems now an exile beyond
the reach of a flirting breeze
or a mirthful grin of warmth.

Hope was once the only thing visible
above monstrous mounds of snow.
Now it lies with the dearest freshness
buried deep down things below.

T. Michael Sullivan has directed the annual Writers' Workshop sponsored by the William Joiner Institute for the Study of War and Social Consequences at the University of Massachusetts Boston since its inception in 1987. Prior to that, he was a high school English teacher and a journalist, winning regional and national awards as editor of the *Somerville Journal*. Subsequently, he was a humor columnist, syndicated among community newspapers. In addition to poetry, he writes humorous rap songs.