

Taylor Graham -- Two Poems

The Water Sergeant

Wind and water heavy with scent of a child
to find – that certain scent rising
from the weekend lake, joining a host

of odors and clamor on summer air,
barbecues on shore, dogs arriving in pickups
yelping to run free where campground

gives up to forest. Drowned boy's mother
paces the shore. The sergeant's dog
shivers to be unleashed, to go to work.

The sergeant knows water and wind,
how to deploy his dog to intercept whatever
lake and weather give back

in exchange for life. Body is mostly water
heavier than a soul. The oils and esters
rise and float, drift on air. His dog

will find them. The sergeant's in charge.
But his own sea-change – diagnosis –
no pearls, or bones turned to coral.

Burl of that great willow growing
at creek's edge, hunched into its roots. A tree
has no words for falling into the flow.

Waiting for Hitch-up

annual Hwy 50 Wagon Train

Sun's up at the encampment,
breeze quickening the aspen, saddle horses
antsy for trail. I've come just to watch.

But that tiny old lady in long pink skirt
and pioneer bonnet, pushing her
walker – she's bound to reach shade

of the closest wagon, for someone
to help her up the steps. Jaw set to the bit.
She'll take her seat on hard lumber,

her place re-enacting history. Was she
an outrider in her day, maybe
even a teamster? Now she pays her fare.

What am I doing here? Two good legs
and I'm looking beyond the pale
horse grazing in front of my windshield –

half-gaze of deep horse eyes –
recalling the black mare I gave up
out of childhood.

Taylor Graham is a volunteer search-and-rescue dog handler in the Sierra Nevada, and serves as El Dorado County's first poet laureate (2016-2018). She's included in the anthologies *Villanelles* (Everyman's Library) and *California Poetry: From the Gold Rush to the Present* (Santa Clara University). Her latest book is *Uplift* (Cold River Press, 2016).