

Taylor Graham – Three Poems

Gone Like the Train

Where she grew up, words meandered
like water down a side-creek, mid-Sierra in May
on its way to find the North Fork;
like a fawn following its mother through
manzanita, or porch-talk between supper and
bed, before TV or even radio, way out there.
No need for succinct, just let the words sprawl
tired legs over the stoop waiting
for an evening breeze. Venison was deer-
meat, and nobody asked if it was legal.

She read her stories slow to us, like the years
it took to get here; how she ran home
to report she saw a ghost-tree –
roadside black walnut from the early settlers,
ballooned all filmy-gray and webby
when the tent caterpillars moved in. Or
how she'd sit unblinking in the three-walled
outhouse as the train rolled by,
the trainmen waving at her but they'd
soon be gone, out to Caldor for another load
of logs for milling into doors.

Did she dream the outhouse might have
a door someday? The train stopped running
decades ago, the mill shut down,
maybe the open-air privy's gone too.

Endangered

The red-legged frog and yellow-legged frog –
creatures of myth, not quite as rare as fog in summer.

I swab the floor in this fourth year of drought,
swish my rag mop in the bucket and out jumps a frog.

Long-legged leaper can also swim
if dry-mud ponds could still remember rain.

Tiny treefrog/chorus frog, dancer in tights.
If I look away he's gone. Does he have the answer?
I clicked my iPad to catch bright of his eye
but the lens swirled water-light colors, illusion, lies.

One small frog merits no documentary,
his chorus a tale unfinished but with a comma,

Traders

for Coppa Hembo, last chief of the Hill Nisenan

What's the retail price of a human life?
Slave traders raiding the village

know, and the old woman left behind
with a gangrenous leg,

mourning her stolen children.
She'll be dead in minutes or days.

No time postponing, thieves on horses
across the river, already gone.

But this father travels silent, on foot,
leading mere boys –

one who chips rock to a lethal arrow-
point; a fletcher who charms

the snakebit pennon to its quarry.
Together they crouch behind bushes,

watch the slavers carousing
with a crazy bottle, hatbands cinched

over poisoned dreams.
One boy stands guard, another

unfeters the slaves, a third
frees the horses so they can gallop away.

The father judges it a fair trade.

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). In addition to *Muddy River*

Poetry Review, she is 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).