

College Guild

P.O. Box 6448, Brunswick, ME 04011

POETRY CLUB III

Unit 3 of 7

Poems by Traci Brimhall

Traci Brimhall, poet and professor, teaches creative writing at Kansas State University. Her poems have been featured in "Poetry Daily", "Verse Daily", "Best of the Net", "PBS Newshour", and "Best American Poetry" in 2013 and 2014. Among the many honors she has received, are the 2008-2009 Jay C. and Ruth Halls Poetry Fellowship at the Wisconsin Institute for creative Writing, the 2012 Summer Poet in Residence at the University of Mississippi, and a 2013 National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship in Poetry.

THE COLOSSUS

In the beginning, none of us could tell rock
from bone. Some claim the desert was once a sea,
and the statue we found facedown in the sand

was a god who hardened as the waters dried.
Others say raiders stole it from an imperial city
but buried it when they discovered its curse.

Each morning we welcome bodies
from under the giant and resemble them
in postures of praise. The colossus daily releases

the fossilized disciples beneath it, but revelation
of stone is slow. Our mallets grow worn, our dowels
dull. The earth falls away, and still it hides

its face from us. We sleep on its back, dance
on its neck, and in sandstorms we crawl beneath
its hands and pray the wind won't take us.

We measure the width of its shoulders, take the radius
of its bald heels, wind ropes around its shoulders
winch it to wheel, but none of us turns the handle

to raise it. What if we recognize the face? What if
the world doesn't end here? Everything will come true –
the flood the famine, the miracle.

WINTER NOCTURNE

We wait for the moon to rise so we can enter
the woods and hang statues of saints from trees.

In a thicket, a doe bent in what could be prayer
nudges her young, waiting for it to rise

from its cold sleep. Owls listen for mice beneath
the snow. The messenger of the gods is also a god.

We carry the dead fawn to the frozen pond,
and in spring it disappears. The ice weakens,

water hides the body. Nothing will hurt us
like love, not even the deer that follows us when

we return to collect the unbroken saints, last season's
nests cradled between branches, all of them empty.

PRELUDE TO A REVOLUTION

We go to prison windows and pass cigarettes, tangerines
and iodine through the bars. Anything we think

could heal a man. Assassins kiss our fingers,
Mercenaries sing us songs about unbroken light

as we mend our shirts. The bilingual murderers recite
lamentations in one tongue, and in another, young myths.

We fold and unfold our shawls, and the men squint
in to the sunlight, dumb with hope. Some days they confuse

the walls of their cage with their skin. Some days,
the sky. They see their deaths in the sweat darkening

our dresses. To sweeten the hours we share scandals
from the city, how curators removed an elephant's heart

from the museum because it began beating when anyone
in love looked at it, how the coronet found minnows

swimming in a drowned girl's lungs. They ask if it's true,
if slaves are chained together on ships to prevent suicide.

We say they'll never be free. They warn us one night soon
the judge will wake to find his bed alive with wasps,

while across town the night watchman will stare stunned
at the moths circling before he realizes he's on fire.

OUR BODIES BREAK LIGHT

We crawl through the tall grass and idle light,
our chests against the earth so we can hear the river

underground. Our backs carry rotting wood and books
that hold no stories of damnation or miracles.

One day as we listen for water, we find a beekeeper—
one eye pearled by a cataract, the other cut out by his own hand

so he might know both types of blindness. When we stand
in front of him, he says we are prisms breaking light into color—

our right shoulders red, our left hips a wavering indigo.
His apiaries are empty except for the dead queens, and he sits

on his quiet boxes humming as he licks honey from the bodies
of drones. He tells me he smelled my southern skin for miles,

says the graveyard is full of dead prophets. To you, he presents
his arms, tattooed with songs the slave catchers whistle

as they unleash the dogs. He lets you see the burns on his chest
from the time he set fire to boats and pushed them out to sea.

You ask why no one believes in madness anymore,
and he tells you stars need a darkness to see themselves by.

When you ask about resurrection, he says, How can you doubt?
and shows you a deer licking salt from a lynched man's palm.

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