

THREE POEMS



Brian Henry

INSTRUCTIONS FOR OLD POETS, OR HOW TO BECOME LAUREATE

You with your back twisted, your neck,
dilate your interference pronto
else the vengeance you find heaped
upon you will be decidedly slick.

Dash your sky dirtward, frown
that aching stretch into account.
Be shorn to lusterless ruins
and drip salvation around.

What you utter, utter slow.
Dust your body with a rag
and acquire a sensitive moan.

When, at night, you feel small,
unsteady, grab the closest leg
and bite—in the absence of leg, the wall.

WINTER FLOOD

Whoever said passion is overrated, spent in these yellowed
ruins when compared to the antics of the oil tank

neglects the decline in values bemoaned in this nothing of a
town
and beyond, at the submerged bridge, the bubbling river
draining,

at the diner, full of smoke, forgiving in girth if not flow.
By no means will anything collapse today, least of all the tower

with the bronze bust on its spire, or the concert hall,
deliciously derelict these past two hours, yet whole.

Somewhere between the riverbank—where it was—and the
floodline,
a child, dim in mind and fortune, lies tangled and thick, brittle

in the crannies of swell and recede, the ice this year especially
volatile,
they say, a thing to watch, beware of.

MAGNALIA AMERICANA

My nation is a pasture horseless in demeanor.
Its contours ignite happenstance from harm-
lessness less distant in manner.
Thrush appointed to hold truck with the pasture
nourish the pasture.
Shares hired to counsel the pasture
thresh the pasture.
When the shape of the sound stripping the wind
builds a wall at the edge of the pasture,
it rehearses last rites
for this burden drained by distance:

Walllessness should not be considered a harm
or lack, but a willingness to counsel
and receive counsel from horses
in a horseless nation,
where the pasture remains as reminder, reminding
the horses of what's remained
and what remains for the horses.