Poetry Series

Tentative Poet

- poems -

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Tentative Poet (18/06/1961)

A doctor in private practice who made the grateful discovery late...
http: //snappoet.livejournal.com/

All these words

Thawing my reluctance
Melting down my insecurity

Till fear gathers
A slimy puddle at my feet

I stand naked, wild-eyed
Exposed, yet knowing somehow

With these words I am safe

Tentative Poet

Fear

He's sure deep within
As sure as if it were
Stabbing his insides

This long sliver of doubt
Driving an unnamed fear
Through his heavy heart

No longer joyous
Now ponderous and deliberate
Unable to soar

The release he knows
But dreads
Approaching

Consequences will follow
The rush of a fire-storm
That shall scorch

All their lives
And leave indelible marks
Upon small hearts

His greatest fear

Tentative Poet

Growing old

Why does she look like that,
My daughter asked at a dinner,

She meant the old lady who sat in a wheelchair,
At a table across from us, her body askew,

Head lolling to the left,
No expression on her face,

And, I think most distressing,
Her tongue appeared swollen,

Stuck in her open mouth.
A maid tended to her,

Leaning over talking softly,
Tapping on the table with a chopstick,

Entertaining the old lady
Whose unfocused eyes looked to the middle distance

Off to one side, as her relatives loudly
Devoured their steamed grouper and shark's fin soup.

She's old, she's suffered a stroke,
I told her, that's how growing old is.

My daughter, silent for a moment,
Digesting the horror of that fact perhaps, sniffed,

Said, I feel like crying when I see her.
I looked over at my little girl,

Who just turned the corner of thirteen,
Her life ahead still full of vagueness and possibilities,

Forced to confront one such,
Her sympathy for the old lady

Overwhelming, dragging a rare frown
Onto her sweet young face.

On the drive home, she was silent, thoughtful.
I wondered if she was

Weighing her mortality,
Measuring her not-yet five thousand days

Against the old lady's five-times-hers,
And finding it doesn't add up

Quite as easily as the sums she does in school.

Tentative Poet

Her

the pale sky cries.
yes, it cries the cry of birds

lost their way,
their direction twisted by

heavy clouds in the path.
thickly the wind whips

their tired wings, chasing
like anger unleashed upon

the unwary.
innocent blood spilled

by ignorance, the seeking
of misery her cross to bear,

the unholy course paved by
dark footprints, each one

a stamp of pain
immeasurable.

Tentative Poet

Muse

perhaps it's the way
the towel hangs
    just so
on the stuck-on hooks

how the toothbrushes
in their cups
    all point in
different directions

or the mirror of
the medicine cabinet
    reflecting the light
in a particular way

does she enjoy residing
in this small cramped space
    framed by
square white tiles?

does she love
the intriguing acoustics or
    how the cistern gurgles
as it fills after a flush?

i hear her best there
when i sit myself daily
    alone with some
anthology of poetry

or brushing my teeth
at the mirror
    minty white foam
all over my grin

even standing
under the shower
    washing off
the worries of the day

she speaks loudest
from that corner
    where a spider has
weaved his web

she presses against me
her lips to my ear
    her voice clear over
the splashing of the water

at times she whispers
as i wipe my body dry

crackling like static
with each run of the towel

i close my eyes as
her honeyed voice echoes
in the deepest corners
of my mind

my heart flutters
in Morse its rhythm
spelling out the mysteries
she reveals to me

then as she departs
ever so swiftly
i stumble out gasping, grasping
for my spiral notebook

Tentative Poet

My Name

my true name is latebloomer:

i never strike when the iron's hot
or catch the early worms
i doze when opportunity knocks
on my door

i only stir when the moon is high
then my eyes burn with joy
and a wild energy

when the night cruises free
i pull cobwebs off my mind
and awaken to
myriad opportunities

Tentative Poet

My window frames

A lone swallow
   Twisting turning
Against gray sky
   As I put on
Morning suit for
   My best friend's
Funeral

Tentative Poet

My words

I make of an offer my words
They speak what I cannot

Through them, if I'm lucky
You may hear my heart

May see me as I may not want
Others to see

Tentative Poet

Ode to the Fork

You taste the meat before me
    Feel the medium-rare texture of
The steak, its juices oozing

All over your tines
    Its aroma reaches you first
My culinary ambassador

I like your odd shape
    Your elegant curved-back neck
Almost like a swan's

I love your shine as you
    Lay quietly among your brothers
Awaiting our beck and call

To team with the others
    The knife and the spoon
And serve us a good meal

Look how far you've come!
    Wasn't your grandfather long
and sharp and pointed?

Thrown through the air
    To bury himself crudely
In the flanks of animals

Tasted the blood
    Of enemies, then
Raised in victory

Then there's your uncle
    Does good work on a farm
Pitching hay to cows

You, a poor shadow
    Domesticated
Like the household dog

Civilized
    Now you stab dead meat
Now you pierce roasted flanks

O you fork,
            you

At least fare better than
    Your distant cousin
The skinny toothpick, whose

Sole mission is to skewer

Tiny pieces of fruits, or pick food scraps
From between teeth

Tentative Poet

Please don't rhyme

It is certainly not a crime
If your poems do not rhyme
As a matter of fact it's now thought
It may be better if they not

Unless they come without haste
And fall naturally into place
It is neater, there's no doubt
Simply just to leave them out

Iambic meter or otherwise
Not rhyming is never a vice
It may even be seen as awkward
Unless employed in a formal sonnet

Especially if you try to force them in
Although that's not exactly a sin
The present participle is just too much
If used repeatedly as a crutch

'Vers Libre' is the way to go
As most current poets know
Don't get caught up in the past
Write yours modern, make them last

Tentative Poet

They remember...(dedicated to teachers)

The man sits, angle-poise on a low table
throwing light, dim orange, onto the book
he holds in his bony fingers.

He leans forward, forehead furrowed,
left hand lifting his reading glasses,
squinting his eyes.

Pausing, he scratches with right index
a spot on his cheek, picks up the cup of tea,
takes a noisy sip, the luke-warm of the liquid
slipping down his parched throat.

He touches his index to the tip of his tongue,
touches the corner of the book, picks up the page,
flips, the finger slow sweeps across the glossy surface,
stopping as he recognizes a face here, another there.

Leaning back, the cup empty, he sees
the photo-frame sitting on the coffee table,
a sad smile curling the corners of his lips,
the pretty face looking out still makes him catch his breath.

Why must it be you, Jean, why not me,
who's old and more ready to leave?
And after our wonderful plans, just as I can finally take
a long break to give all my time to you.

He wonders if he should go make another cup of tea,
maybe have a biscuit, or the left-over pot of porridge,
yet he did not feel hungry, haven't really been
ever since he lost her.

He left soon after her death, his leaving quiet,
briefly announced, a small party in the staff-room
solemn and awkward.

As he cleared his things off the corner table,
the cardboard box brimming twenty-year-old memories
they watched from the corridors, fresh young faces,
curious and troubled.

He had not planned it that way, did not want to leave them,
so near to their finals, had wanted to finish what he started,
wanted to bring them right to the end.

But there was no way to explain his loss,
too soon to discuss how his heart was torn,
his life wrenched out of orbit.

So he walked out, after three years
with this lot, abandoning their warm familiarity,

not even a goodbye, not sure if he could face
their disappointment

The calendar on the wall shows him a year later,
shows him it's a day past the day he used to cherish;
he sees them in his mind, their photographs
in the dusty annual a reminder

Where are you now, my children?
how Jean used to laugh at that, some of his 'children'
heads and shoulders above him.

You must have forgotten old Mr DeCruz,
who understands, how could I not,
after what I did?

Walking in to get another Digestives,
he remembers the small pile of letters
sitting on the kitchen table,
left yesterday after he made tea.

He sifts through them, one catching his eye,
blue envelope, neatly printed address,
his name in bold, something very familiar
in the handwriting.

Carefully slicing through with letter-opener,
he stops in mid-nibble, afraid suddenly:
what if it's not what he thinks it is?

Unsteady fingers unfurl crispy blue paper,
he perches his glasses, begins to read:
'Dear Mr DeCruz, We miss you! We understand why....'

The man sits in silence for a long time,
his shoulders shaking, his dead wife's photograph
on the table a blur, as white Kleenex grows on its surface

They remember, Jean:
they remember

Tentative Poet

What Good is Poetry?

To awaken us,
Show us the honest beauty
Of our souls

To amuse us, to entertain,
Focus and centralize the variegated attention
Of us, poisoned by MTV, and shows of reality

To revel in the presence of mystery,
Expose the veiled layers of meaning
Our entangled lives keep hidden

To render helpless, to induce to smile,
Refresh our antiquated views of
How to live life vigorously

To reveal, to hide, to mystify and over-ride
The mired muck of our desperate lives,
Sweep clean tainted sensitivities

And wipe dry the muddied screens of mediocrity
To allow us, if lucky, a privileged glimpse of eternity,
In words rearranged, refreshed, revitalized,
And offered honestly

Tentative Poet