

Isolated Pockets of Thoughts

Pale orange cracks
the clouds.
As my eyes adjust
to early morning,
a pair of ducks curve past
my motel window.
I had just been thinking
of where
home
would be next year.
But those mallards
made part of me think of you:
or that pair who once
flew close together.
Today, this morning,
in the same state
we are still miles apart.
Language cannot project
what we mean to say.

And I think of the stories
which have included you,
included me—us,
now told in isolated pockets.
We mention each other
in passing
to our friends.
But the ducks flying closely together
mean something, don't they?
Mean that mates stay together--
as we do in some strange way.
Not physically perhaps,
but still
in some way—like
the way the ducks
know how
to turn together.

Joyce Rain Anderson

Night Rain

came when we were hiding
from the heat,
when the hum of air
conditioners droned
with dull words.
Inside we did not hear
the dancing
leaves
as clouds sifted drops
like whispers
promising what we did
not know.
Later, walking
from the building,
the miracle glistened
in footsteps
on brick walks.
Flowers lifted
their petaled lips
and trees
echoed soft wind--
the earth drinking again.

Joyce Rain Anderson
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Owl Hunting

I follow my father
through the woods
in the same footsteps
as a child tagging along.
Loaded down with equipment
he listens
and I unburden my story:
his waiting for me to get my life together;
my waiting for him to be less critical.
He's older; I'm wiser.

As we cut across the cemetery
hard stones stare back
in moist morning air.
Both of us have
other things to do.
Yet we find
the woods again.

The great owl perches
in the tall white pine.
Horns stand at our approach.
Too many steps, she swoops
to pull our gaze from the nest
where two downy young
wait her return.

Dad and I move back,
using the small oaks and pines
to hide us from view.
We wait
standing a few feet apart,
saying nothing,
after years of practice.

Joyce Rain Anderson

Untying the Tongue

They come to my class
to learn English
and for the first few days
my tongue stumbles
through their names.

I feel ignorant.
How do I pronounce
your name? Please.

“It does not matter,”
they tell me. “After all,
we are here to learn English.
Our names are not important.”

Years ago in this country,
Indian children
had their names stolen
from them in schools
where only English
was spoken.

The first wave
of immigrants coming
through the gates
of this country had
their names changed by a slip of tongue.

We try to trace our family
names
only to discover
stumbling blocks: a name rewritten
on the *official* books.

My students tell me in their jobs
they use American names;
their own too difficult
for native-born
customers to pronounce.

They are used to the difficulty
I am having in learning
their names.

And I look at the list again,
names foreign
to my English
tongue twisted,
pleading you must
help me
learn your name.

You've Handed Me Your Hat

I took you today to the doctor's office--in the city
somehow expecting some answers, but none were given.
And I would have taken them from anybody--

the doctor
his assistant
a receptionist
you
even myself.

What seems to have happened though is that the gap widened--
not that there's any blame to place anywhere, really.
Of course it's expected--

messages get mixed all the time
*what you thought you heard turns out to be something else but somebody said it--
so somebody thought it and certainly everybody misinterprets*
some thing some times.

So we--you and I that is--drove into the city to start over, well
start over diagnosing the disease

--not the relationship where you and I--what--continue
to live in the same house and pretend
we're not married? Wait--
Don't people usually live in the same house and pretend to be married?
But we never did anything in a conventional way--

"This is my wife," you said to the doctor.

That stopped months ago.

Doesn't it sound strange? How about instead--"This is my
estranged wife."

Though the strange part was helping you undress, pulling off the sweat-soaked T-shirt--
putting on the johnny--opening first in the front, then in the back,
then back to the front again.

Exposing your skin that twitches, thin arms--the muscle gone.

Feeling
distant,

I sat back and watched
as they (the doctor and his assistant) prodded
and poked, twisted and stuck you--with no degree of gentleness.
And feeling your pain I wanted to say,

"Stop it hurts
him."

It does--it did--it continues to,
but staying silent--hat in hand--I turned away.

Joyce Rain Latora

Indian Ruins

for Judy

We made our way
across the gravelly trail
to Wokaki.
A tall structure of red
flat stone speaks
from its place on the rise.
The ancestors of the Hopi and Zuni
built these walls,
sheltered themselves
from the erupting earth.
Each stone fits
tightly on the next
and cool air blows in
the east opening.
We are taken back to that time,
feel the ground echo
footsteps of the past.
In the desert sand are tracks
and we follow them to a rise.
We sit next to a juniper
and feel her heartbeat.
Junipers grow slowly and live
for centuries.
Wokaki sings from across
the sand.

Joyce Rain Anderson