

An impressionistic painting of a rocky shore. The foreground features three large, rounded rocks in shades of grey, brown, and purple. The water is depicted with vibrant, multi-colored brushstrokes in shades of yellow, orange, purple, blue, and green, creating a shimmering, textured effect. The overall style is reminiscent of J.M.W. Turner's work.

2023 POETRY CONTEST

passager

MINAS₂₃

GRANDAD'S TRIP

When he was seventy, he drove in all the way
from California with a trunkful

of marijuana. He'd heard
it was a cure for schizophrenia.

He drove through every kind of state.
Sometimes what he did was called a crime,

sometimes it wasn't. In some towns folks were wide awake.
In some they tossed and turned in bitter old trances.

He didn't care. All he wanted was to save someone he loved
from the hunger of her dreams.

The risk was nothing. He didn't think, he drove.
Once or twice a day he stopped for gas

and a sandwich. When he arrived in Philly
the stash was wilted, the cure of course –

an empty rumor. But that drive,
that endless drive, it changed him.

It changed him into what he'd do,
what he'd always do until the end,

for love.

Bill Van Buskirk

SILENT

Emergency room nurse, 1947

Barely 20,
he huddles silent on the gurney,
all knuckles and knees.
One eye wide,
one swollen shut.
He's not talking,
but I can read the story on his body –
abrasions

contusions

lacerations.

Some punks worked him over like a side of beef.
They nearly killed my brother that way –
tried to beat the sissy out of him,
like this kid.

It won't work, bastards.
It won't work.

Mary Cronin

SAFEKEEPING

Mind falls down and pounds the floor,
a tantrum of incomprehension,
trying to embrace
a billion atoms, maybe two,
tumbling over inside my skin.

I am an archive of everyone
who has passed by, who has dipped her toe
in the water or brushed me with her breath,
pushed her history from her body into mine
to rumble in my throat a song
spinning from my mouth
her atoms into mine into yours.

There is no end to this responsibility,
safekeeping all that you have ever been
and I, and Einstein, and dinosaurs
in the library of atoms I carry into
dinner with friends conversing about politics
while busy exchanging microscopic bits
of ourselves, losing track of yours and mine.

Collette Sell

CAT'S CRADLE

Without speaking English, my grandmother
taught me to play Cat's Cradle, one rainy
afternoon. We sat facing each other,
beside her black Singer sewing machine –
the name in gold leaf, an iron foot pedal
underneath. I could see my reflection
in her glasses, as she held out her hands
to make a tight bridge from a loop of string.

She learned the game as a girl crossing
the Atlantic Ocean to Ellis Island,
where a guard smiled at her and shook his head,
after failing to pronounce our family's
consonant-cluttered native surname. Then,
smiling again, he crossed it out and wrote *Levine*.

Richard Levine

MIDNIGHT AND THE VETERAN

About midnight,
coming to bed,
I cradle my forehead
between your shoulder blades,
gradually, quietly,
since you are so at peace, adrift.

Shooting stars begin to fall,
then hiss like illumination flares,
swelling into tracer bullets
pocking up the dirt all around.
I dream your nephew Adam and I
are lost on patrol in Afghanistan.
But it can't be.
I'm still under rocket fire in Vietnam.
Where is the sapper who
can detonate these obstacles?

Then, to identify my body,
I hold myself against you
for an hour
while you sleep.

Eric Forsbergh

LODESTAR

It is a worthy thing, to make a poem;
to weave a tapestry of words

with syllables that sing close harmony,
and images that paint in vivid hues;

a worthy task, to craft a phrase
that conjures up a startling metaphor;

worth the time, to seek the perfect word,
or choose precisely where to break the line;

to sculpt cascading stanzas
and refine their shapes and flow.

A worthy thing, and joyous,
to unspool a skein of language,

numinous as twilight,
and spill it on an empty page;

then gently free the tangle,
and let fresh imagery emerge.

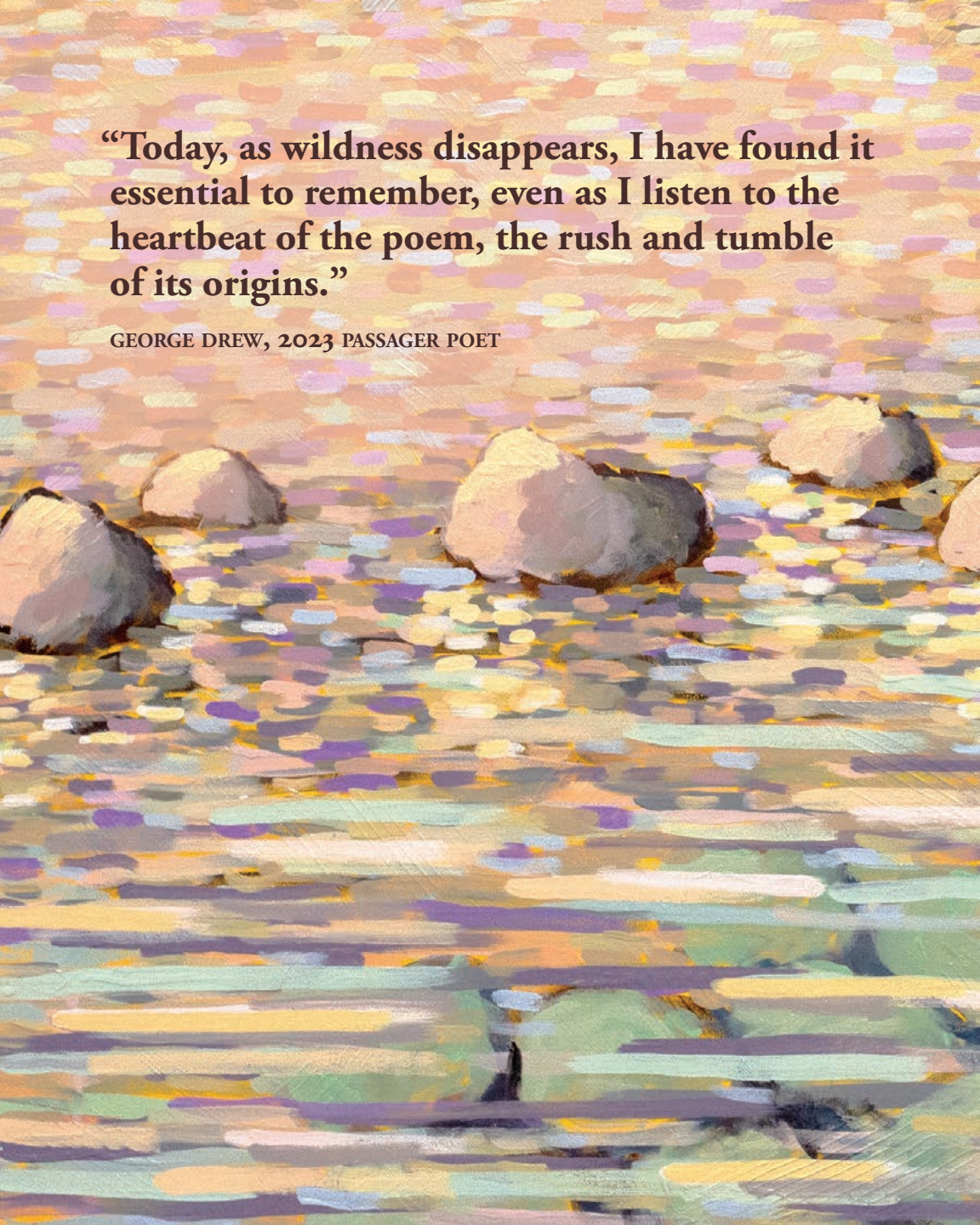
Soon words begin to gather into questions,
and lines arrange themselves in answers.

And on a journey through the shadowlands,
when all the maps are wrong,

sometimes a poem can light the night,
or show the way to cross uncharted wilderness.

It is a worthy thing, to make a poem,
perhaps to be a trail sign for a traveler,
or a lodestar that leads the poet home.

Karen Bashkirew



“Today, as wildness disappears, I have found it essential to remember, even as I listen to the heartbeat of the poem, the rush and tumble of its origins.”

GEORGE DREW, 2023 PASSAGER POET