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Three Poems by Betsy M. Hughes

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Betsy M. Hughes

Tea with Emily

My numbing fingers could not hold the pen --
I had to close my tired eyes --
Transported to her Amherst garden then ---
I was awakened by surprise --
 For there she was, the creature of my dream --
 Costumed in customary white --
 She set the tray of tea and sweets before --
 I almost fainted with delight --
I claimed I had no right to dialogue --
“*I’m Nobody* -- while Fame knows you! --”
But since I’m intimate with love and loss --
She claimed I’d find which words are true --
 The trees bent gently over us to hear --
 She introduced me to her flowers --
 That afternoon I rendered gratitude --
 For her accounts of Nature’s powers --
“You made me love the little hummingbird --
Its *Evanescence* and its *Wheel* --
The sun does rise *A Ribbon at a time* --
Thus you described and made it real --
 “And I appreciate your poems of joy --
 I too am *Debauchee of Dew* --
 Like you I’ve reeled *thro endless summer days* --
 From skies, those *inns of Molten Blue* --
“Your words have weighed the heft of my despair --
Oppressive *certain Slant of Light* --
On *Winter Afternoons* when I’m bereft --
My seasonal disordered plight --
 “In pain you’ve written knowingly of death --
 And on our mortal losses dwell --
 Your heart cries *Parting ... all we know of heaven* --
 Is surely *all we need of hell* --
“But even in such trials there is hope --
The bird *That perches in the soul* --
And you remind me that this saving song --
Has healed me and returned me whole --”
 For hours we talked until the tea was gone --
 The garden faded, and my pen --
 Without my guidance moved across the page --
 My thanks to Emily again --

Inscrutable

The rumor saw him in a shadowed wood --
a stranger in disguise, a cheerless clown,
the figure looming close enough one could
make out his enigmatic, friendless frown.
What was it in the jester's smiling grin
that caused the witnesses such awful fright,
that paused their normal breathing, made their skin
both crawl and chill at the confusing sight?
His face was white, his mouth was red with blood.
Or was it lipstick smeared with love? Or hate?
They felt their hearts, the palpitating thud:
This lunatic they must abominate.
Such sighting makes the viewers lose control
of reasonable response, of heart, of soul.

Syria

December, 2016

The brutal civil war was five years old,
and broken neighborhoods had been reduced
to rubble. Residents were waiting, cold --
some hundreds numbed by trauma and confused --
until the buses, leaving in a shroud
of white, evacuated in the snow.
As heavy flakes descended, heads were bowed,
submitting sadly to surrender's blow.
Their ancient city stronghold was no more.
Both rebels and civilians shared this plight:
Now refugees, where would they go before
they'd find a home? Who'd help them in their flight?
Aleppo's sorrow is a gaping hole
in global conscience, plea to save our soul.