

Three Poems



Carol Grametbauer

writes poetry in Kington, TN. She is chairman of the board of directors of Tennessee Mountain Writers, and had a 25-year career in public relations at the Department of Energy facilities in Oak Ridge. She is also a colored pencil artist whose works have been exhibited at the Oak Ridge Art Center's juried Open Show; her poetry and her art are frequently based on nature themes.

Last Rites

After the mourners drifted off,
gone separate ways, we stopped
by the house, detached and silent.

The afternoon was warm for early
April; leaf buds swelled
blood-red on maple branches,

papery blooms of white azaleas,
pierced through by shafts of light,
snuggled against the sun-warmed brick.

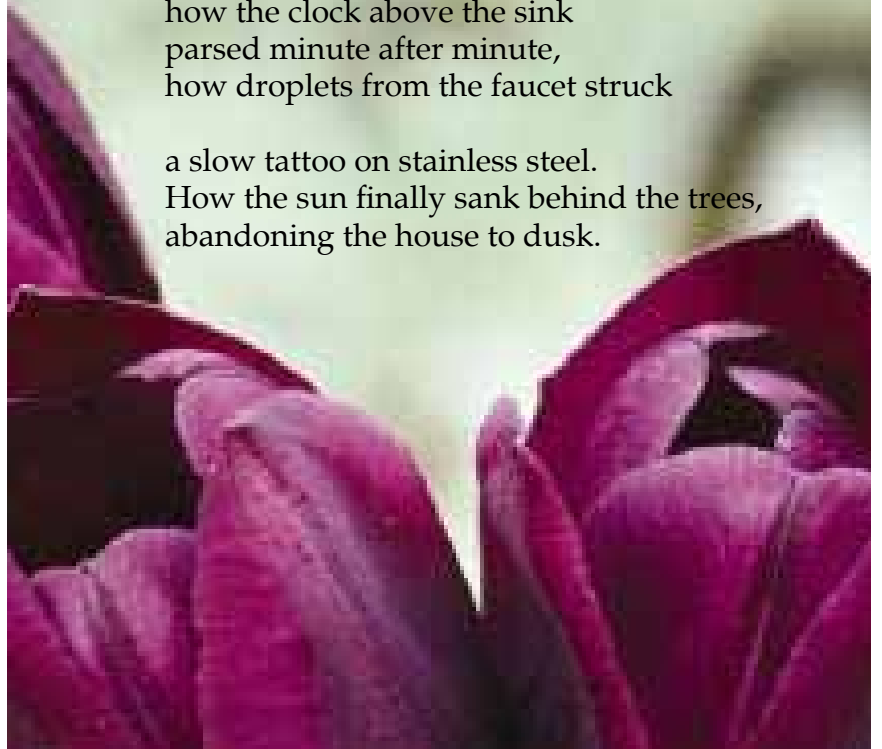
Tulips she'd set out last fall
had bloomed at last, bright quilt
of crimson-orange encircling the lamp post.

Inside, sunlight captured
drifting bits of dust, sprawled gold
on arms of empty chairs,

splashed patterns on the carpet.
I remember how the old
refrigerator muttered on,

how the clock above the sink
parsed minute after minute,
how droplets from the faucet struck

a slow tattoo on stainless steel.
How the sun finally sank behind the trees,
abandoning the house to dusk.



Now and Then

Now the field and the tree
crickets call all day and through
the night. In the thicket
by the road, Joe-Pye
hangs heavy heads of dusty
purple; sumac's muted crimson
torches thrust themselves above

dry leaves tinged with yellow. Now
the jays call teacher! teacher!
through the holy hush of morning
fog. Slant rays of sunlight strike
the wall at unexpected angles
in the afternoon; tawny
sulphur butterflies soar and bob

past ripening persimmons. Now
hummingbirds cluster on feeders
like short green cigars,
sucking strength to carry them
across the yawning Gulf of Mexico.
One burnished leaf falls,
vanguard flake of the blizzard to come:

Then the final flower's final
blossom will lie frost-killed
on the grass; then the chill
gray air will thicken, tattered
in a thousand spots where
the sulphurs and the hummers
and the crickets lately pulsed their wings.



The Year in Review

That was the year a Carolina wren
laid five perfect speckled eggs in the cupped
fronds of our staghorn fern, when a toad
moved into my terra cotta
toad house under the walnut and stayed
for weeks, creeping out at night to draw
dew from dripping leaves through its leathery skin.
It was the year the mophead hydrangea
came alive with tiny hairstreak butterflies,
gray-brown wings splashed with vivid lines
of crimson; when a viceroy caterpillar
morphed to chrysalis on a willow twig.

In Iraq that year, innocent
civilians died in roadside bombings,
emaciated children in Darfur
gazed huge-eyed at TV cameras.
Here at home, an unwed teenage mother
stuffed her still-warm newborn in a trash can,
then left to meet her boyfriend at the mall.

But it was the year a ring of ragged
red-brown mushrooms sprouted underneath
the pin oak in the front yard almost
overnight, a blue-tailed skink climbed fifteen
feet into the poplar stalking insects,
a peach-petaled azalea bloomed in late
October -- events I chronicled

in my notebook, as day succeeded day,

chartreuse spring revolved to wine-red autumn,
weaving my tapestry of words, shot through
with leaves and petals, wings and beaks;
weaving a shelter I could survive in.