

CAROL DAMIOLI

Crater of Her Absence

She had thick wavy hair
past the shoulders,
a dark-chestnut crown
only trickled by gray
when chemicals rudely gripped
it all
and it fell.

It used to banner out behind her
on footrace courses
where, legs pistoning,
she'd overtake men
who would then accelerate
and return the favor,
to salvage their self-esteem.
A ribbon she won
declares in gold:
Goddess of Speed.

Artist, fellow traveler,
restorer of the wounded,
lover of wild creatures.
Deer now leave their tracks
in the snow beside her name-
stone.

Born 17 months apart,
the gap between us,
the crater of her absence,
now a score-plus years
going on infinity.
I watch it widen and deepen.

I reach for solace
in scattered kindnesses I
extended
and wish
there had been more.

Carol Damioli has worked as a reporter and editor for newspapers, international radio, and trade magazines. Her second novel, Portrait in Black and Gold, will be published by Inanna Publications in the fall of 2013.

KELLY ROSE PFLUG-BACK

I remember the day,
alone in the bathrooms
you lifted the uniform's tattered hem above your breasts
and showed me the roses tattooed on your chest

dark whorls unfurling around the puckered scars of entry wounds
where bullets sang through flesh, once
and sank themselves in bone
stopped shot by some blind fate from silencing, forever
the heart's sharp tongue

to know prison is to know a world
too small to hold love's absence
in the solvent light of perating theatres
of interrogation rooms

you wept behind the mask of a stranger's face
as all that you once owned was peeled away

corrective excisions
invasive procedures
the grand striptease that comes
at the end of it all.

When snow's greyed lip pulls back from city sidewalks
I will return from this place
changed and heavy
shuffling like a sleepwalker in the sallow warmth of winter sun

while the bark and rattle of automatic guns
still echoes in the dark
behind your eyelids
every time the cell doors slam

freedom, my tenuous concession
I would give it all away
To see you turn to smoke in their hands

a gust of torn paper eaten to lace by flames
carried high above the razor wire's clawed coils
houses, castles, roads, stone walls
all swept away
in the wake of your passing and swallowed back
into the blessed, healing night

Kelly Pflug-Back's poetry, fiction, and journalism have appeared in a number of North American journals. Her first compilation of poems, These Burning Streets, was published in 2012. The above poem was written while she was in jail for G20-related charges. For more, please see <http://kellypflugback.wordpress.com>.