

PRIZE-WINNING POEMS

JOOP BERSEE

Lewy Body Days

Lewy Body Dementia as possible diagnosis, 2017

After the diagnoses
The distance is closing in.
I only have to stretch my arm,
perhaps a little more, to touch
the horizon with a finger, stroking
the cat's back walking past.

The days are changing from azure
fingers to an old, damp tweed jacket
as I set out. The boat beneath my feet
disappears into the cataract fog with
its face no longer chained to my shame.

I am a fragile story,
A snail on a busy road.
Who put me there without thinking?
Of course, there is no thinking.
A bird sees me and pecks me in half.

Love, money, mashed in a foggy bowl.
The wardrobe in a shredder,
only the smell of a dead bird in a pillow case
lingers on, takes us by the hand
into the sun, the bloody egg shell.

What is there behind me?
O, nothing. Yes I saw that bird.
There it goes. All the way to
the blood sun with its sails.
We will see that later. Patience.

Of course we will never arrive, not knowing
where we sang our songs, nor recognizing
the towers of our castle where margins killed
themselves, jumping down, clinging onto
their pillow cases, smiling the real deep sleep.

I remember leaning against my spine.
Now I sit in my veteran wheelchair,
or lean on my walking stick, gun powder
still in my hair. No I am not retired. My war
goes on, sniper ready to blow my brain out.

I pruned the roses scratching me,
joyful colour of blood so beautiful.
Each day I love my joints, ligaments
obeying my brain, months, years
the disappearing heart, unfamiliar.

And the LBD site makes
a buzzing sound, like microphones do
following you around,
from the green country to the blue
alleys filled with examined, sliced brains.

They say I repeat myself.
The waterfall is one long repeat,
the pyramids. I am forgetful, I heard.
I cannot function at work. I must leave.
I will be quiet now, and won't forget.

They say things behind my back,
or above or under me, somewhere,
where I can't go yet. Likely a room
I have never seen before. People are
the same. I won't mention any names.

All roads lead to nowhere,
to where I began: walk a forest
and the strange sound of a bird.
Is it a bird? I bet it is just powder
with a pulse, effortlessly outliving me.

A constant rain and I use my hairbrush
trying to brush the feeling in my skull away,
brush it into the sea – ridiculous – or,
better, a darkroom, no more measuring
the slow act of dying, into the hands of rituals.

I am leaning and breathing, hear the
pheasant, push my walking stick deeper
into the mud where soon lambs
will leave their tracks behind, by the gate,
as if taken by something cruel.

Losing means a slow blinking of
my eyes. Cutting my finger nails,
in the rubbish bin. Me. A bit of a nail
is a bit of me. I keep them now. Tape
them to my hands; I'm still here, complete.