

Winter 2020

June Night with Mars | American Sonnet, Unwritten | Paper Body |
Guidelines for Mating Season | Emily Post's Advice to Painter
Grace Hudson at 23

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Poems by Judy Halebsky

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Poem titles:

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Artist Statement: Based in somatic experience, these poems are devised through a process of collage and juxtaposition. Shaped by memory and everyday life, they reflect the geology, flora, and fauna of Northern California. Spoken language and the dissonance between the literal and figurative meanings of words also shape these poems. Through them, I seek to voice unspoken moments wonder, joy, loss, and impermanence.

About the Author: Judy Halebsky is the author of the poetry collections *Sky=Empty* (New Issues, 2010), *Tree Line* (New Issues, 2014) and most recently, *Spring and a Thousand Years (Unabridged)* (University of Arkansas Press, 2020) which was a finalist for the National Poetry Series. Her chapbook *Space/Gap/Interval/Distance* (Sixteen Rivers Press, 2012) won the Poets-Under-Forty award. Fellowships from the MacDowell Colony, the Millay Colony, and the Canada Council for the Arts have supported her work.

June Night with Mars

First slight red of dawn, a rooster, then a flock of birds chiming. dark brown with sun, my fingertips like pokka dots. the woman next door with rope climbing arms offers chocolate as medicine, a need that can be bottled and filled. here we say break a leg with: *in the mouth of the wolf*. I whisper: *death to the wolf*. put my hand to my chest to feel the vibration. get my ticket and sit in the front row, eyes closed. strangers are among my closest friends. Birds live in cities, travel in flocks, land in the same tree.

American Sonnet, Unwritten

(invisible ink that will not appear if submerged in water) (or translated into steam) (or held up to the sun) (sorry)
(true story) (— the opposite of truth is not a lie) (the opposite of truth is forgetting) (a description of colonialism) (or how we forget what happened on this land) (who happened or who did what or who owned what or who owned whom)
(unforgetting is a process) (work on it) (start now) (sleep later) (when you are dead) (or passed out from exhaustion)
(the preacher says *if you can't be on the frontlines of the struggle*)
(there are people who have been on the frontlines for twenty, thirty years) (they are tired) (if you can't be on the frontlines)
(*hold up someone who is*) (let them rest) (this is a way of unforgetting) (unrealized, ignored) (unceded land) (the unforgetting) (hold them) (or walk with them) (or say their name)

Paper Body

A pattern is printed on tissue paper
dotted lines mark where to cut the cloth

between here and my grandmother

of the many skills I have lost —
how to pierce another set of lines
to differentiate the lived body from the paper body
stitch line and salvage

— her voice saying, *you'll need more cloth*

Pastor McBride at the podium says,
we've armed ourselves like an army

as soon as he went missing
they started a search—

procession between chapel and grave

they found his car parked at the side of the road
gun case open on the passenger seat

later they found his band uniform
washed and hung in his locker

a pattern is printed on tissue paper
dotted lines mark where to cut the cloth

caliber — the weight and diameter of a bullet

which travels faster than the speed of sound

between here and my grandmother

you'll need more cloth

there are things we don't hear until after

Guidelines for Mating Season

— After Elna Baker

Watch your line (not the train) (the line of your body)

of high heels, he says, *I thought you guys
would have gotten rid of those years ago*
(guys means women) (meaning he is entirely not involved)

after losing a hundred pounds, the girl on the radio
got a job and a boyfriend

it is not possible to overdo Zumba

to hear Hijikata tell it, when he dances the voices of the dead
come back to life through his body

at minus a hundred pounds and now married, she says
I doubt that he loves the real me

you will be asked to remain silent, to run downhill
in a bikini, to catch fireflies with your hands
to steer across a lake in the dark

there will be a release form
(it is not meant to protect you)

Hijikata would fast for days before going onstage
(covered in ash) (sinewy arms, veins, collarbone, eyes crazed)

she says, *we don't admit how much of love is actually physical*

Emily Post's Advice to Painter Grace Hudson at 23

“You are two girls, away from home alone,
and ought not receive gent's company too much.”
—a letter to Grace and her sister from their father

Your father wants you in by 9:30 pm
what he means is to keep up appearances

art is often misunderstood
so nod politely, then repeat your main point

imagine the forest as your body
the fog coming up Market street as your air
what matters is to love fiercely

respond to a letter within a day
write in a flurry as though you are talking, fluttering
one wing beat gust to another

of the divorce, remember
people know what you tell them