

Jane Kenyon Poetry Prize – Second Prize

Teresa Whitman

What ***Kwahada*** Means

for my son Forrest Kwahada Tahdooahnippah

1

This stillness falling deepens everything.
We wake to falling snow.
My son at twelve lengthening.
When he stands, I must look up.
Fine hairs darken his upper lip.
He refuses boots and leaves for school.
Halfway up the hill, he disappears
into snow that falls and falls.

2

He opens a classroom window
and yells freedom to the flying flakes.
Asked to sit at a desk, he says,
"Please call me the Reverend Tahdooahnippah."
The calls begin again.
We sit in the principal's office.
Outside the falling snow.

3

In preschool, he drew his way
through reams of paper, a release:
the rabbit's winter fur growing lumpy
the edginess of nose pink light
drawing faster and faster the falling snow
until an art teacher told him, "Don't scribble."
At age twelve he plays a guitar and says, "Hendrix scribbled."

4

Blades scrape ice.
Mouthguard like a bit.
Helmets, pads, breezers, sticks –
it is difficult to tell which boy is mine.
Wet flakes fall through the wedge of light.
He glides on one blade.
He holds the other tip up – the boy with the long reach.

5

Now we argue.
I say, “No freedom but in discipline.”
He says, “No discipline but in freedom.”
Why can't I just believe that he will find his own way?
I say, “Wash the dishes.”
He spreads his hands, fingers fanning wide.
He slams his bedroom door.
The walls of our home shake.
When he blasts the volume on his amp,
I run down three flights of stairs,
unscrew a fuse from the electric socket.
Alone in the silent dark
I fear the child in me,
the man in him.

6

Falling snow like the Comanche language –
no still nouns: only action that brings stillness.
Kwahada doesn't mean wild horse or antelope.
The word translates: quickening grace,
waves of flight over open plains.
Towahsee: moving along the shore.
Tahdooahnippah: young man who wakes before dawn.
My son of the *Kwahadi*.
We wake to falling snow.