

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Jen Karetnick: Three Poems

Jen Karetnick · Wednesday, April 7th, 2021

### Congressional Complex

I could not sting like a bee or float like a butterfly  
 though I did learn to throw a punch from my trunk,  
 not my wrist, after our father taught my sister. A shadow  
 boxer, a flyweight, I followed her from the split-level house  
 to the Little League where she was the first girl to play, another  
 way for the other gender to spend a lengthening spring afternoon.  
 Formed from former gravel pits, the fields were shielded to the right  
 by hills of shale and river rocks rising over the stand of pin-boned pines  
 we generously called "the woods." We were warned away from here; horses  
 wouldn't be able to drag us out were we to fall under an avalanche of these stones.  
 But no one advised a boy not to toss them as flirtations, which is how one landed on  
 my lip; struck dumb, it spurted into a bucket, empty of baseballs, that I brought home.  
 Even after surgery, I swallowed his name like blood to wear the fist he made me for life.

(Previously published in *Prime Number Magazine*)

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### My Husband Shoots Me

with Botox, 31 times  
 in my forehead, the shallow dish  
 of my temples, the nape of my neck  
 where as a younger man  
 he'd touch his tongue,  
 a fencer's foil.

He does not hold  
 the syringe like a love letter  
 or wield it like an apology  
 although he says a quiet  
 "I'm sorry" every time

the needle pierces

the cartilage under skin  
with an audible crunch;  
fat, a loosely guarded prisoner,  
has long since escaped my face,  
muscles pulled tight  
from migraine after migraine.

I follow his directions  
to look up, down, wrinkle  
my forehead like a chow  
so that he can measure  
where the nerves are,  
avoid making my eyelids

droop more than they  
already do. He assures me  
the puncture marks will fade,  
the medicine diffuse, block  
the transfer of pain, lengthen  
the staccato of light.

Three decades ago,  
he practiced tapping my joints  
as if they were ice  
with a rubber hammer,  
thumped my ribs, dug  
under bone for my organs

and lymph nodes. Now I reap  
expertise, fanned by  
his trajectory as he wasps  
around me, and I wait, still  
within this vortex, to be stung,  
and stung, and stung.

(Previously published in *jmww*)

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## I'm Nothing Without Blood

The vessel that tied us together was filled with thrombi, tacked  
to the sides, building in. Each cruel word was a weed slowing  
the river, every argument a gnarled stick for the dam that grew

like an olive tree in the garden at Gethsemane. These are the kinds

of knots that bad sailors and stubborn Jews make: those that can never be undone. What was stagnant began to fester. Only nit geredt could wiggle

through. It's easy to guess what happened next. Excavation failed. The walls broke free. One of us was buried, one of us dug out. But the whole, sticky mess occluded both of our eukaryotic hearts.

(Winner of the 2015 Anna Davidson Rosenberg Prize, sponsored by *Poetica Magazine* and published in its anthology)



### Connections:

Jen Karetnick's website:

<https://jkaretnick.com/>

Link to *The Burning Where Breath Used to Be*:

<https://www.davidrobertbooks.com/karetnick.html>

Jen Karetnick's Amazon author page:

[https://www.amazon.com/Jen-Karetnick/e/B00I4ZXIMU%3Fref=dbs\\_a\\_mng\\_rwt\\_scns\\_share](https://www.amazon.com/Jen-Karetnick/e/B00I4ZXIMU%3Fref=dbs_a_mng_rwt_scns_share)

Link to *SWWIM*:

<https://www.swwim.org/>

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