

Patricia Dobler Poetry Award, 2014 Winner

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Float

By: Wendy Miles

1.

An open door.
A child pauses on a step.
Her head turns, lifts to hear
her name float above the yard.
A child is an open door.

The child holds her breath
at the thought of what it means
—her name—stills
to hook it to herself with a bright pin.
A child is a breath.
A name is a bright pin.

2.

A low sink. An open window.
A mother leans at the low sink,
shirt off, breasts pressed to a towel.
Barely audible, Oh, she says, it feels so good
you just can't believe it.
A daughter is an open window, a folded towel.

Shampoo the scent of ginger.
Warm water pours from a plastic cup,
spreads along the mother's pink crown,
neck, around creases at the backs of ears.
The daughter breathes in the mother.
Water dribbles from the chin,
from the daughter's fingers.

A mother is a low sink, warm water.
Animal, Animalis: to have breath.
Love is a plastic cup. Love is a breath.

Judge's commentary

The entries were read by poet Yona Harvey. Of Miles' poem, Harvey wrote:

Among the compelling finalists, "Float" is the poem to which I kept returning. The reasons to return were many: the deceptively simple and suspenseful opening stanza; the blues-tinged flashes of repetition; the cinematic unfolding of the poem's action; and the curious relationship between a child and her mother. This is a poem that details and charts its surroundings: "open door," "low sink," "open window," but whose destination is not predetermined. Like a curious child, the poem comfortably follows its nose. When the poem asserts, for instance, "[a] child is a breath," that assertion has been preceded by a joyful deliberation. And what to make of the mother in the second half of the poem? She animates the objects she touches, graces them with awe, and sparks the daughter's delight. And what of delight? The poem is filled with it.

About the author

Wendy Miles, a finalist for the 2013 Perugia Press Prize, has published multi-genre work in places such as Tupelo Quarterly, Arts & Letters, Southern Poetry Review, Hunger Mountain, storySouth, The Pedestal Magazine, The Chattahoochee Review, Caesura, The Dos Passos Review, Yalobusha Review, The Comstock Review, Hawaii Review, Richmond Magazine, and the Anthology of Appalachian Writers Ron Rash Volume IV. Nominated three times for a Pushcart Prize, Miles lives and teaches in Lynchburg, Virginia. New work is forthcoming in Alabama Literary Review.