

Patricia Dobler Poetry Award, 2018 Winner

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The Grocery Store

By: Donna M. Glass

The girl had no garden
unless you count the rutted side-yard
of prayer rock, blue eggshell,
ambulance song of her father's anger
and her mother's need
all grown together,
thin as dandelion seed in midair.
Yet the girl had a friend.
On Saturdays, the two friends walked
to Stockton grocery
where cold fluorescence hung
over rows of iridescent Styrofoam,
ordered like census data:
white hen/white egg, red hen/brown egg.
The two friends liked taffy.
One folded green
and one folded purple.
Each tore away half to share
on the carousel just outside
where they rode a fiberglass horse
on the dimes of kind passersby,
rode double until the money ran out,
and then took the long way home
across a field, and if the air was warm,
they set their shoes side-by-side,
braided one another's hair,
and watched a flock of blackbirds
crash through walls of ragweed,
always falling back to the ragweed.

Judge's commentary

Poet Judith Vollmer, the judge of the 2018 Dobler Award, wrote this about Glass' poem:

A haunting tribute-song, "The Grocery Store" constructs two girls' long walk seeking home and safety inside fractured rural America. Their companions are blackbirds, "walls of ragweed," and a sacred friendship, intimate and delightful in its immediate palette of "green" and "purple" paper-wrappings of candy. Dreams of nourishment are shadowy and tantalizing, envisioned through crevices of a rough-cut mosaic—a field, a world-only the girls are capable of seeing. The girls' vision, glimpsed through a long-lens

of reportage built on sharp and relentless consonance, startles with lack: "no garden," "side-yard," "half to share," and "always falling back[.]" Simultaneously, the vision sings in steady flames of open, chiming, slant, and eye-rhymes. That balancing act of narrative-within-sound-stage reveals the poem's wonders. Repetitions of "home" spit against "grown," in a landscape stunted by familial heartbreak and a nation in which food is controlled in

rows of iridescent Styrofoam

ordered like census data:

white hen/white egg, red hen/brown egg.

Real questions abound: Who among us counts? Who is shut out or "stored?" Who depends on "dimes of kind passersby" (ghostly strangers); and who, ultimately, writes the stories of girls-such questions inhabit poetry's urgencies. "The Grocery Store" diverts its lyrical pathways around mere didacticism, and gives us tenderness, courage, space, and declaration alongside the simple act of two friends setting "their shoes side-by side[.]"

This is a stand-out in a group of excellent finalists.

About the author

Donna Glass was born in Dunoon, Scotland, where her father was stationed for military service. She grew up in rural Oklahoma. Having worked in law offices most of her adult life, Glass considered a career path involving legal studies when she returned to college at age twenty-nine but decided to pursue English, for she dearly loved literary arts. After earning her BA and MA in English (concentration in literature), Glass began her career as a college instructor. For about nine years, she commuted 230 miles (round-trip) once or twice each week, pursuing a doctoral degree in English/creative writing/poetry. She currently teaches English and humanities courses as faculty at Oklahoma State University Institute of Technology.

About the judge

Judith Vollmer is the author of five full-length books of poetry including, most recently, *The Apollonia Poems* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2017), and *The Water Books* (Autumn House Press, 2012). Her previous books are *Reactor* (University of Wisconsin Press 2004), nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award and featured in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review*; *The Door Open to the Fire*, awarded the 1997 Cleveland State University Press Poetry Prize and finalist honors for the Paterson Prize; and *Level Green*, Brittingham Prize, Wisconsin, 1990. She also is the author of the limited-edition collection *Black Butterfly*, winner of the 1997 Center for Book Arts prize. Vollmer has received poetry fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, and residencies from The Corporation of Yaddo, the American Academy in Rome, the Centrum Foundation, and others. Her poems have appeared in *Poetry International*, *Agni*, *The Women's Review of Books*, *Poet Lore*, *Cerise Press*, *Prairie Schooner*, *The Fourth River*, *The Great River Review*, and many other journals and anthologies. She has read her work nationally at colleges, universities, museums and

galleries, arts organizations, and community centers. Her essay on Baudelaire, "The Stroll and Preparation for Departure," is included in the *Cambridge Companion to Baudelaire* (Cambridge University Press, 2006). Vollmer teaches in the Low Residency MFA Program in Poetry & Poetry in Translation at Drew University. She is a recipient of the Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award of the University of Pittsburgh and is a founding editor of the literary journal *5 AM*. She lives in Pittsburgh in the Nine Mile Run Watershed.