



Amy Fleury

Distinguished Kansas Poet

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Amy Fleury's collection of poems, *Beautiful Trouble*, won the 2003 Crab Orchard First Book Award and was published by Southern Illinois University Press in 2004.

Her poems have appeared in *The American Life in Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *North American Review*, and *The Southeast Review*, among others. Her fiction has been published in *21st* and *The Yalobusha Review*.

Fleury has been a recipient of the Nadya Aisenberg Fellowship from the MacDowell Colony and a Kansas Arts Commission fellowship in poetry. Though she now resides in Topeka, where she teaches at Washburn University, she is a native of Nemaha County.

Backroad

I remember that first whiskey kiss,
desire clambering up the ladder of my ribs.
My hair was wreathed in wood smoke
and the soft crush of leaves.
I wore his flannel coat every day that winter.

Driving those backroads, I could count
the lazy bales slumped in the snow,
each fencepost strung with barbed wire
till we found our place in the windbreak,
where breath was our own kind of weather.

Across the acres of corn stubble and stars
our folks slept in the depths of their quilts.
The clocks in our kitchens trembled at the hour
while we left warmth in the wake of our hands.

Come spring the thaw ran the ruts of the road
and our stand of cottonwoods began to bud.
And on a night riven by lightning
we gave in to the rhythm of rain.
After, with the truck stuck up to the axle,
he sent me, storm-blind and aching, through the field.
I remember hope, slender as a grass blade,
and guilt, caught like a thorn in my throat.

Nemaha County Nocturne

The difficult stars parse the night into silence,
benediction, dream. Between soil and silo thrums
the grammar of grain and all of Kansas rests.

The slender roots of weeds suck at the dirt,
and the listing windmills and ruined barns
lean toward their beginnings. Flowing north,

our river glides through glacial cuts
and those ghosts of primitive sea.
A turtle, overturned dish

of flesh and patience, swims
against history's blur.
Locusts resurrect

the wind and with
reluctant tongues
we name it

holy
holy.



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Consolation

Once there was a walnut tree that shook its sorrows onto our house.
At night we could hear them clatter to the roof,
tumbling over shingles, wobbling down the pitch.
In the bellowing wind, the tree bent beneath the eaves.
Its branches tapped and scraped at our window
until my brother too unfurled from the tight husk of sleep.
What were we to do? A boy, a girl, adrift in our beds,
washed in the shadows of a tree bereft.

On autumn days its roots followed me all over the yard.
Hulls lay about. Squirrels pillaged the hollow snouts.
We raked the torn leaves into piles,
and in the chilled evenings they burned.
The smoke lifted from loam to limbs;
ash settled on our shadows, our coats.
What would we make of a life both blighted and blessed?
There was trouble all around and everywhere little mercies.

The Fugitive Eve

In the first moments of knowing,
juice drips down her chin onto
her breasts. Lips and tongue learn
in this oldest, truest way.
The fruit is round and radiant
The firm weight of it feels
like power. Shreds of flesh catch
in her teeth, and as she eats
she knows it is good.

He needs no serpent to tempt him.
He just wants what she has, just as she wants him
to want what she holds in her hands.
They share it, then toss the core into a bush,
knowing that this is the beginning of death,
the first and best blessing.

And with the original chill of delight
and shame, she is on the lam,
running through brambles, plum boughs,
and luminous webs, past low slung branches,
past the birds of the air and beasts of the field,
over the rocky soil, stumbling out
of the garden, out of the numb perfection
of before into the brilliant and difficult ever-after.
She is running and running, she feels
the warm rub of her blood-slicked thighs
and a thudding, which is her heart. He is close
behind her, clutching the pain in his side.
They take hold of one another
in their wonder and woe,
and we call out to them
from our place in the future,
this moment, now. We beg them
with our fragile voices,
*Mother, Father, bear us
into the beautiful trouble
of this world.*

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