

Comments by Judge Leza Lowitz:

The winner of the 2022 Judd's Hill Poetry Contest is "The Night You Dropped the Bordeaux" by Gary Stein. I am so grateful to everyone who submitted their wonderful work. Having had the privilege of judging this contest for a decade now, I have had the pleasure of reading hundreds of poems about wine. There is often a commonality of theme and imagery, so when a poem comes along that surprises, it is a delight. This was one such poem. It centers around the experience many of us have had of a broken bottle, or even a spilled glass, of a treasured wine that has been saved for a special occasion. With economy of imagery and subtle rhyme, Stein zooms in to the details of the moment: "splintered glass glinted in street light," then pans out to the larger issues: "promise bleeding away" and further out to "faith and hope also fail." And in the end, the surprise, the redemptive moment that comes after the loss: "the idea for this poem" and finally, the creation of it. May we all be so inspired to celebrate and to make art from our grief and losses and to remember that life itself, with all of its joys and sorrows, is the "special occasion."

THE NIGHT YOU DROPPED THE BORDEAUX by Gary Stein

"There are no accidents." –Sigmund Freud

Aged in oak, shipped from France
cellared a decade. Remember
how it slipped, splintered glass
glinted in street light, guttered

promise bleeding away.
Grape to wine, grain to bread
every sip a miracle easier
than wine to blood, host to flesh.

Faith and hope also fall.
Some Bordeaux is plonk, corked,
some enchants tongue and eye:
bright as rubies, not purple stains.

It wasn't me but you, who don't
drink, who carried then let it drop,
handing me instead in dim light
a memory, the idea for this poem.

Grapes
For Emily

by Beth Boylan

You ask me how to move past that place you and he shared
over bottles and bottles of wine, in the dry mountain air,
each sip a miracle—though he never understood
the poignancy of grapes.

An afternoon returning to a favorite bookshop or roadside grill,
the quiet patio under the elm—I don't ask if you ever shared
conversations worth a postcard
or laughs that didn't make you flinch;

if he ever traced a line of sun
along your thigh
or connected your freckles
into a constellation,

if he ever called you his universe,
his planet, his sky
(though even a star is hard to see
through the bottom of a glass).

I'm not sure how we escape
these old haunts
that creep through our insides
like barren vines or ghosts—

like the tiny grape in drought
or the spilled drink on slate,
just hold still
and pray for rain.

Drinking Sapphire Wine by Katharyn Howd Machan

She chokes, at first, in this new world
where she's been imprisoned. Windows
dare to show her air she cannot breathe
without a mask, a loop of wire
connected to some greater power
she's been told to call God.

Blue her tongue begins to tell her.

Essence of the fullest sky

your fingers tried to touch in childhood.

She sips again. She lets her mouth
embrace the liquid jewel they've offered,
these beings without freedom's wings.

They call her *Mary*, claim she will
give birth to light, a universe
of love all stars and planets need.

Pour me more she beckons, nodding.

I've left behind a life of sand.

Make me shimmer, precious glass.

I'll be what you say is holy

as I lift this cup with my simple hand.

At the Bottom of Your Glass by Katharyn Howd Machan

Leave just a splash of crimson.
Even if it's only a sip,
the grape will shimmer, call,
and when you slowly leave the table,
small wings will gather, wait for the moon
to bring just the right small ripple of light
to welcome celebration. Faeries
heed to old tradition too many of us
have lost. Don't empty. Don't let your tongue
indulge in a last satisfaction.
Let the liquid linger, naming
you as a drinker deserving gifts,
wise in dreams, understanding the world
is made of more than sums and figures,
tight calculations of good wine's cost.

As I Travel to Key West by Katharyn Howd Machan

I'm wearing clothes that are
too big, too loose:
turquoise stretch jeans
sliding down my hips,
a huge-shouldered jacket
painted with fish.
Even my watch with its
bold glass beads, face
a flamenco dancer.
Even my golden ring
so wide
it catches light through
the airplane window,
gleams as the miles
stream by in air,
almost reflects how I'm
far past fifty,
a poet traveling
to share words with others,
a drinker of wine
who knows how to pour,
a mother leaving her
children at home,
a wife whose husband
loves her need for wings:
a woman comfortable
flying south in winter,
a little big,
a little loose.

2 poems by Lucia Kiersch Haase

Cadence

Mountains stand guard distantly
watchful of a deeper valley.
Painted shadows on courtyard walls
loom but with a welcome presence.
Quietly, the grapevines stir
breezed by winds coming 'round
from the ocean, beyond a city
leaning in as if to whisper-
'Sweetness lingers...we'll be back.'
And as the sun begins to settle
on the tail of a quiet evening,
from somewhere in a far-off woodland-
there echoes a fiddler's jocund melody.

Vineyard View

This picnic table suits me fine
on the patio as I dine
here on watch by each grapevine,
standing, thriving line by line
while I'm befriended by a glass of wine.

From up above me, there's a spill
of sunlight o're a distant hill-
within the breeze, a wine-like chill...
and another glass yet to fulfill
while spending time here at Judd's Hill.

is difficult to escape: Dionysus dips
his fingers into a chalice, smears claret across his face,
ferric smell: moss and boysenberry

David drinks it from the woman's mouth
instead of a glass, drops the size
of seeds accumulate on lips
like whispers: *here, taste this, be this*

A Psychic Visits Napa The Day Before The Earthquake

(Please note: The 6.0-Magnitude Earthquake occurred at 3:20 a.m. Sunday, August 24, 2014)

Let's open that bottle of Cabernet you've saved for so long.
Let's drink it right now, out of your Waterford crystal goblets.

Let's not care if we drop the glasses and break them,
Let's not try to get the wine stains out of your new carpets.

Let's eat those grass-fed organic steaks from your freezer
and that hand-crafted coconut mango sorbet.

How's your supply of flashlight batteries? Candles?
Hoarding any more choice bottles we could drink tonight?

By Susan Wolbarst

Villarena by Giovanna Lojacono

Passed the gate
a small unpaved road
leads to an unexpected place of peace.
There is a field that relives every time,
in each player who, with or without shoes,
kicks a ball,
in the black dust that sticks to the legs,
that rises at every shot.
Under the white umbrella
elderly gentlemen converse,
enjoy the sun,
accompany the music
with very light movements,
someone will bring them food and wine.
Inside the palmento
barefoot boys
press the grapes
splashed with red
they dance
they hug
they scream loudly.
Someone grabs the hard broom to push the wort away
flowing in the tubs.
A tray of pizza passes from hand to hand,
so the stomach can give to head
the balance that wine takes away from it.
Near the cistern
children play with cats,
they steal something from the kitchen which was covered
and forbidden to eat yet.
Then it is evening
and I multiply unreasonably my greetings
cause it is difficult for me to leave,
and I kiss again
those from whom I had already taken leave
in the hope
to give birth to other chatter
and pass the time
that already wants me back home.

Miracles of the Vine by Joe Pulichino

what astonishes everyone most at the wedding
is that the best is saved for last.

the host, knowing there is nothing left in the cellar,
smiles coyly at his steward's apparent sleight of hand;
and ebullient with this impossible wine,
he savors his guests' delight.
Ah, the bouquet of this miracle of hospitality!

some guests, relishing a quick fix to turn the dance lighter,
the tempo quicker, the singing more boisterous,
and the coupling less discrete;
barely taste the new wine's whole richness
and lose the longer, more surprising finish.

others, though seeing the stunning ferment
of a supple mind creating,
accelerating the ordinary into the uncommon,
do not appreciate the subtle hints
of pineapple, mango
and soft oak;

they do not notice the magic of this rich, lush miracle,
of nature's lovely balanced labor:
roots drawing water from soil,
vines extending to sun light,
growing flesh of fruit
sweetness finely turned to spirit.

it happens every season
day by day,
miracles
in ordinary appearances;
in every vine, every taste,
the miracles we savor,
taking so long, becoming so common,
barely seeing them happen at all.

what astonishes me most about you
is your living at the edge of miracle,
creating the best out of a long, late harvest.
making it last

miracles of the vine
complex and full bodied
pour slowly

Illuminated by Wally Swist

The sun shone through
the basement window, the same color
as that of a rose in an initial letter
of an illuminated manuscript, boldly
bathing both of us

in what offered itself up
as an eternal moment, as are all moments,
but this one clearly opening
in all directions about us,
with our standing beside your boxes

of framed prints and me holding
a bottle of a good French Syrah
I had just selected to compliment
the mushroom and brie frittata
and roasted vegetables I had just prepared

upstairs in the kitchen, both of us floodlit
in the brightening flash of sunset
filtered throughout the basement,
even the shadows cast along the walls
sun-streaked, with a luscious rose hue,

that will always appear to us as a page
in an opened book, always there
for us to savor, an illumination
to be remembered, clarifying for us
what is always important for us to see.

too much
of anything
even love
even

not wine
but
Love even
is a different ty-
 pe of
 drunk en ness

my Love
and i
want to sip
your intense notes
of ripe peaches
hints of oak
spicy (bitter, tart?)
finish
all of It

 too much
Love
with a clear
head

— Sonia Nicholson

song of wine by Victor Pearn

allured by the choice
grape wine in the wine glass that
glazed chalice so lustrous in the dark
I would sip swallow and sip again
but strummed guitar strings call me
at distance compelling me afresh
to serve ukraine in battle

do not ridicule me if I stretch out
drunk or no longer alive
on that battleground
where no life endures
how many continue to live
and come back to their birthplace
from battle whatever the war