

Poems from Our Wisconsin Poets Laureate 2001-2026

Love That Red

By **Karla Huston**

The mouths of their tubes open,
luscious tongues reaching.
I'm drawn to them--the thick
color embedded and shaped,
the sheen glistening,
the slanted tips fat with promise.
My mother wore Love That Red
and when she put it on, I knew
she was going farther
than the clothesline
or the edge of our corner lot,
knew the way her lips pursed
that love it or not, red was her color,
the way it lit her brown eyes
and she was taking all of it with her.

Divining

By **Dasha Kelly Hamilton**

Maybe it's nothing
Too many hugs
Too few chances
Detritus of millennia blurring lineage

Maybe it's not the work of gods
rattling scattered femurs and leaves
Don't you already wish upon
words, bones and stars?

Trace a knowing etched into your nature
Summoning the wind, bending time
Maybe, it's a not a thing

Maybe you've always
been fluent
in dreams

Good Fortune

By **Max Garland**

If poetry is the craft of words that clarify,
as well as the gaps between them
that re-mystify, reminding us of things
less factual than true, more musical
than memory, infused with ragged strands
of intuition, what good fortune
to approach the outskirts of what
we'd always hoped to say
or be, what luck to be allowed to briefly live
within that which briefly lives within us.

May Flowers

By **Margaret Rozga**

A steady, a gentle, an April
day rain, a good-natured rain,
an imperturbable rain. Rain,
like an uncontested political
campaign, doesn't need my rhyme
the way dry March needed timely
poetic rain, the way after a dry
spell, I need a steady, if not gentle
fall of words from an unpromising sky.

The Way We Love Something Small

By **Kimberly Blaeser**

Inky leaf shadows on snow,
each animal track a hollow:
trace of bird feet, double oval of
deer;
the glyphs we make—

the ones we follow.

[from] Yellow Birds of Morning

By **Nicholas Gulig**

In the place I teach myself to sing
nothing is apart. All of us
arise together, living briefly
in the early morning
sunlit beauty of the flesh. Here,
where I am, there,
where you are, our voices merge
into a chorus. Listen with me,
learn to look. In the ever-growing forest
of my heart, a flock of yellow birds
have landed. Can you hear them?
Their song arrives and we do. They sing to us
and through us. Their voices give to us our names.

Peace

Oh the swell of it
December's white room of snow
the moon's round slice of silence
random stars dazzling the sky
Peace

[from a longer poem **By Ellen Kort**]

Constellation

By **Bruce Dethlefsen**

one leaf is not a tree
one feather not a wing
no crown a king nor single
note a melody

from darkness are we made
and born alone our light
our lonely stars though bright
and strong will quickly fade

unless we string the stars
together choose illumination
then in constellation hope is ours

bring on another day
sing light in common song
shine for the night is long
and dawn is far away

shine for the night is long
and dawn is far away

The Coming of Age

By **Marilyn Taylor**

Last summer, I grew old. It was gradual
and damned implausible, I thought. Why mention
something so subjective—and so fragile?
Why give it any serious attention?
Just a quaver of the brain, I thought.
A gathering of neurons that were sick
and tired of catering to an overwrought
mob of memories on a pogo stick.
I'm talking arms and legs here. And sensations
sometimes called reflections. Dreams. Desires.
Know what I mean? No useless speculations,
flimsy euphemisms, qualifiers—
but I'm not worried! Just a bit perplexed
about what's pretty likely coming next.

Great Blue Heron

(after a photograph by Peter Sanderson)

By **Brenda Cárdenas**

As native to Wisconsin as wetlands,
our king of blue-gray birds emerges
from summer sedges splashed with rain,
pauses mid-stride in marsh mist's
ghostly hover, feathers still as fringes
on a resting shawl. If only his restraint,
his unblinking yellow eye would teach
us patience's lesson, the tall stretch
of his serpentine neck deliver grace.
Do you see pterosaurs in the shock
of sleek plumes sweeping from his eyes
to the nape of his neck? Do you hear
pterodactyl in his squawk and fawnk
when he has finally caught the fish
and flown to treetops? May they remind us
that we too carry ancestors in our faces,
gestures, voices. That we too might reflect
the blue light of lakes, streams, rivers
if only we slow our steps and look.

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