

Patricia Dobler Poetry Award, 2016 Winner

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After the Accident

By: Dana Salvador

for my cousin

Lying face down in the harvested cornfield
surrounded by broken, golden stalks

he pushes himself out of his body like
a butterfly tears through a chrysalis.

He dusts off his clothes and strides to his
overturned pick up, resting on its side,

an animal, sleeping. He's a mechanic
and can fix almost anything, even this wreck.

He's already made estimations of the damage
to the drive train and frame and wonders how

he could've survived as he reaches to touch
the once smooth metal, now crinkled like tissue

paper, but feels nothing. That's where our
grandfather—gone these many years—

finds him, standing confused, bewildered.
He puts an arm over his shoulder while

the sun from the October morning crests
the horizon frozen with frost. Our grandfather

says, "C'mon then," and they walk toward
the sunrise as light distills them each to dust.

Judge's commentary

Poet Allison Hedge Coke, the judge of the 2016 Dobler Award, wrote this about Salvador's poem:

“‘After the Accident’ is a stunningly beautiful poem of death and transference. Its content offers unexpected departure a realm of continuance. It is an exceptional juncture of split-second fatality and comfort. Deft pacing brings the reader into awareness just as the subject lands in the confusion of disaster. This is tough to pull off and yet, here, it is seamless. The narrative is told in ten couplets. Each set is rich with effective imagery and compels the reader by unfolding the details of scene; the aftermath of wreck suffered by a cousin. A mechanic, in life, the cousin surmises the situation, thinking he ‘can fix almost anything, even this wreck.’ By the time we witness him reaching out to touch the vehicle, we suddenly know his hand will pass through it. Just as we share the breath of demise, the poet surprises us again, with an appearance of the shared ancestor, ‘Our grandfather’ who ‘puts an arm over his shoulder’ and leads him into horizon, ‘as light distills them each to dust.’ The certain beauty here is well-rendered, providing minimization of the material world, of embodiment, and significant reprieve. There is no mourning, no grief, no sentimentality, only a beautiful gathering of souls on the edge of day. I love the fullness of the piece, the immediate familiarity and relevance it offers, the succinctness. This poem is memorable, one for the books. The turn carried out so beautifully, it stills reckoning just as reason breaks. Fascinating. ‘After the Accident’ is truly remarkable.”

About the author

Dana Salvador's work has been featured in the North American Review, Fourth Genre, Water~Stone Review, Cold Mountain Review, Red Rock Review, and North Dakota Quarterly, among others. Additionally, she is the recipient of a Vogelstein Foundation Grant.

About the judge

Allison Hedge Coke's authored books include: *The Year of the Rat* (chapbook), *Dog Road Woman*, *Off-Season City Pipe*, *Streaming*, *Blood Run* (poetry/verse-play); and a memoir, *Rock Ghost*, *Willow*, *Deer*. Hedge Coke has edited eight additional collections, including: *Sing: Poetry of the Indigenous Americas*, *Effigies* (Pacific Rim), *Effigies II* (US Continent), and *Ahani* (ToTopos). Current projects include *Burn* (MadHat Press 2016), *Effigies III* (Pacific Island) (2017), and the *Red Dust* film-media-lit-music project (in production). Hedge Coke directs the *Literary Sandhill Crane Retreat & Festival* and has been awarded fellowships/residencies with Lannan Foundation, Weymouth Center for the Arts, Kimmel Harding Nelson Center, MacDowell Colony, Hawthornden Castle, Great Plains Center, and her honors include an American Book Award, Library of Congress Witter Bynner Fellowship, a Lifetime Achievement Award, a Mentor of the Year Award, an IPPY Medal, a Pen Southwest Book Award, three distinguished positions, and numerous literary and arts grants. She is a poet, writer, performer, editor, and literary activist. She came of age cropping tobacco and working fields, waters, and working in factories.