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THREE POEMS

By BARBARA F. DEFCOWITZ

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Tea Kettle Requiem

The tea kettle moans,
grieving for the days
it would not only whistle but sing,
fountains of steam
rising from its 3-ring silver spout,
its moans soon joined
by a chorus of voices
keening from inside its domed
and dented copper-green belly

I extinguished the flame
but the kettle kept wailing,
cups it had filled adding loud cracks
along with a clatter of saucers, brabble
of spoons. I could no longer stand
such caterwaul, walked into the night,
dumped that ancient kettle in the trash

Yet no matter how I swaddled it
with the Sunday Times, my best
quilt and shawl, a handsewn tapestry,
the kettle kept howling. Terrified,
my neighbors screamed: had a pack
of wolves or rockets attacked the city?

But after the cops and the bomb squad,
FBI and Homeland Security
cautiously hauled off the kettle
I myself began keening
in the pre-dawn silence--
not from guilt or alarm
but a frantic desire for tea.

Manhattan Marigolds

I walked with head down
searching crevices and sidewalk cracks

for a single marigold

in bloom despite the bottle-caps,
cigarette butts, wads of gum
discarded from centuries of mouths,
now a black rash spread across
the city's flanks.

Once I saw two feeble threads of grass
between MacDougal St. cobblestones,
once something mustard-yellow
near Herald Square that turned out to be
a drop of dogshit; days and blocks later
a precarious gleam on a subway grate:
just a brass tine from a broken comb.

Weary of walking head down,
after scores of false sightings
I convinced myself I'd never find
a marigold to match the one
that blooms in a jar inside me.

So I shifted to searching for replicas
of the many other
rare and lovely things conjured within

What the Round Things Mean

In the same aerial photo
there's a cluster of mushrooms,
umbrellas of a crowd
holding a massive protest,
upside-down tea cups
set out to dry on wide racks,
the bowed heads of penitents,
a turtle convention, a village
whose huts cling so closely
they could be a colony of barnacles--

Photographers love
to look down at such spectacles
but the mere blink of an eye
changes matter, so the issue
of meaning is up to the viewer.

As in the next shot,
a Rorschach of water glasses
caught from a ladder's highest rung.
The half-empty people insist
those round things are severed heads;
the half-full contend
they are dunes and slopes.
Literalists see only lopsided circles
as drawn by a child.

But genuine rebels prefer
to smash the glasses to slivers,
such an act creating,
from a photographer's viewpoint,

	the best image of all.
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Barbara F. Lefcowitz recently published her 8th collection of poetry, PHOTO, BOMB, RED CHAIR. Her fiction, poetry, and essays on a wide range of topics have appeared in over 500 journals; she has won writing fellowships and prizes from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Rockefeller Foundation, among others. She lives in Bethesda, Maryland and is also a visual artist.

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