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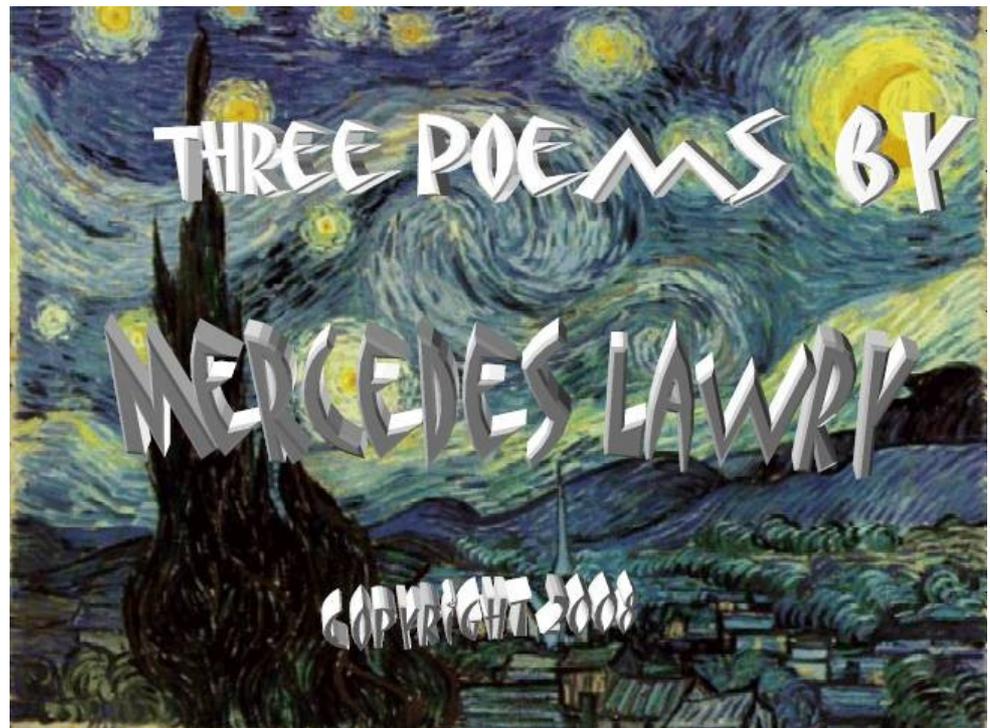
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Who is Sleeping?

The birds come off the wire.
One at a time,
their wings flutter and lift.
They soar, each
seeking its own arrow of wind.
The damp air edges toward sour.

We fall asleep separately.
Inescapable heat and restlessness.
I flop over and back, curling
and splayed, deeper into oblivion.
I cannot bear your breathing, the grunts
and shifts of weight.
I lie here, straining to hear
you across the hall. Are you
there yet, free of the wire,
swimming in the dreamy seas, sleek
and unburdened, while my envy
circles the dark rooms, stumbling,
frantic, as the hours loosen and fall.

Clutch Breathing

It's loud, this heart,
this blood pump. Body
in the small deadly shiver
of panic. Throat taut,
I wait, breathe, wait, breathe.
Try to slow the galloping,
but the punches follow
like bullets. My grinding teeth
pull the choked words
under my tongue. I am inside
the tightening, fighting
collapse. Cognizant
of each particle of atmospheric
pressure, like a set of blocks piled
on my chest. The weight of air.
All disguised, this tidal fear threatens
to swamp me. I clasp my hands,
press each finger, one through five.

Salvation and the Storm

At first, I wanted to run
straight into the terrible green
swallowing quickly, the sour clink
against my teeth. To wrap
myself in the deadness of the air.
This was far from madness.
This was the urge to save my life.

Outside, the bough of red camellias, tossing
in the erratic wind, the light
in the window across the road,
the eternal crows. Where was time
in all of this? Where was the thing
I was losing?

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Mercedes Lawry has had her poetry published in *Poetry, Rhino, Nimrod, Poetry East, Seattle Review*, and others. Her chapbook, *There Are Crows in My Blood*, was published by Pudding House Press. Her fiction as well as stories and poems for children have also been published. She has received awards from the Seattle Arts Commission, Hugo House, and Artist Trust. And, she has been a Jack Straw Writer and held a residency at Hedgebrook. Currently she is the Director of Communications at the Museum of History & Industry.

