



[Home](#)

[Summer 2011](#)

[Winter/Spring 2011](#)

[Autumn/Winter 2011](#)

[Summer 2010](#)

[Spring 2010](#)

[Winter 2010](#)

[Autumn 2009](#)

[Summer 2009](#)

[Spring 2009](#)

[Autumn 2008](#)

[Summer 2008](#)

[Spring/Summer 2008](#)

[Winter/Spring 2008](#)

[Editor's Note](#)

[Guidelines](#)

[Contact](#)

Five Poems by Kelley J. White

Labor

my body split open
like a stone and sang
a praisesong
to the mothers
cave gone light
with dawn

Marian's Coffee's Gone Cold

Grounds emptied into her daughter's sink
Two hands trembling
Cigarette burnt down to her fingers
Drawn shades let first light
Spell out the dry morning news

Martial Art

after you fell in love
with that poster of Bruce Lee bleeding
like an arrowless Sebastian I
went into the back of the little shop
and had them wrap up
a clay statue as tall as your arm as a gift.
You set him on your bookshelf in
fighting stance but his balance was poor--
I heard the crack at midnight.
The only thing broken off
was his hard leading fist.

Meaning

tomorrow is father's day
they're here, children,
two couples spooning
in the beds on maternity
a baby boy
bundled as peace
at the foot of each bed,
the girls, small, after their bellies
have emptied
the boys, manchildren, cornrowed braids,
backward baseball caps, hoodies

they wake to argue
over newborn names
I leave them to new anger
already divided in their sons

and what has this world offered them
the painted pride of a street mural
on the vacant street

a fallen rowhouse
the ghost of stairs
climbing behind
a flaking waterfall

we watched the children
dancing last night
beside Lotus Academy
a carnival squatted
on an empty lot

and over the boarded up world
a little bird
harries a hawk

Mummy

I have put my right hand in charge
of too many things so I am going to try
to love you with my left knee and give my feet
over to the families at my work. How
to be fair? I have three children.
Do I give the girls my ears and
the boy my nose? Ah, this is
almost balanced: my lips to
my daughters, tongue to
my son. (No, that doesn't
sound right.) My poor
backbone will do service
to my mother and my teeth
have followed my father
to another place and inside,
well, you have my stomach,
the children have my guts,
my patients have my liver
but I still keep my heart
in my own canopic
jar.

Pediatrician **Kelley J. White** worked in inner-city Philadelphia and now works in rural New Hampshire. Her poetry has appeared in journals, in *SNReview*, *Corpse*, *Rattle*, and *JAMA*. Her most recent books are *Toxic Environment* (Boston Poet Press) and *Two Bird in Flame* (Beech River Press). She received a 2008 PCA grant.

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