

May 7th

a collection of poems
by Kelley J. White

May 7th

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Biography & Acknowledgements



Mother of three, Quaker, inner city pediatrician for more than twenty years, collector of stray animals and seeker after Buddha nature. One full length collection, *THE PATIENT PRESENTS* (The People's Press) and a chapbook, "I am going to walk toward the sanctuary," (Via Dolorosa Press) more forthcoming. . .

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1909

MaMa, I think you would be pleased to see
that I live in a fine house. I have good
clothes, though it is useful I am so thin;
I can wear Miss Ann White's hand-me-downs, pinned.
I am lonely sometimes. I wish I could
just once walk with you. In heaven surely
I believe you must see and know I am well.
I am Companion to Miss Ann now eight years
but next fall she will go away to school.
I am expected to be Upstairs Maid. You
will be pleased to know I have my own idea—
these last months I have made a friend of Cook—I shall
join her at the stove! Already I help row
the heavy boat to market. How strong I grow.

1914

Dear Lillian Boyer Williams, I am
Gladys May Boyer, your sister, your twin!
Our Uncle Zias came calling Sunday
and said he had learned recently of a way
to find you, through a family that took you in
when we were orphaned. Imagine then
my surprise and my happiness. Forgive me
that I do not remember you. We were
small children. Three or four I think. No one
had room to take us both. I became companion
to the child of this house, Miss Anne, unaware
that my own sister was hidden from me.
Lillian! I hope you are happy too!
I will soon find a way to visit you.

1919

Dear Sister, I am wondering if you have found marriage kind. There is a young man, younger brother to a doctor in this town, who has sometimes come to dinner in this house where I am cook. Some evenings he seems to linger on the porch, and others he seems to walk near the dock beyond our lawns. I find him handsome. He keeps his hands in his back pockets and is usually whistling. I have heard he has new ideas. Perhaps I am foolish. I am, after all, a mere servant in this house, an orphan fully without prospects and only lately did you and I meet. Tell me, how came you to know your husband? How did you leave service behind for that one man?

1927

Dear Lillian, Jay and I may try to drive
to Media when it is summer. My new son
is slow to walk and speak but an easy
baby. Junior would enjoy a chance to busy
himself with his cousins. They will become
fast friends I am sure. Sister, how did we live
so many years without knowing each other?
When I see you it is my own face I see
so perhaps I could say we were not apart.
I was so lonely despite my companions. My heart
longed for something. They did not foresee
the pain of separation. We had lost father, mother
and now to lose you, my twin, alone.
I cannot believe I did not know of you, my own.

1934

My mother-in-law has been with us six years
now. O, Lillie, the boys play with her blindness
but she is tolerant of them. I am grateful
that she does not see the poverty of my estate,
the way all of my clothing is darned and dressed
a year or more behind style. I fear
that the repetition of our meals
will lead her into an understanding
of our tightened circumstances.
Jay goes out each day. We make the pretense
that he has employment. We are withstanding
the changes, but so much must be concealed.
The boys each are serving at the altar now.
They need good shoes. If your finances allow...

1938

Oh, Lily, I was sorry to hear that you had sold
the carriage house. The children did so love
to play in the lofts and rafters. We heard
them laughing often. But times are tight, concern
must reach even Jack at the bank. Jay is resolved
to find a new position but for now the old
is suitable. We are warm, our home
quite cosy, the boys enjoy the company
of other children here at the orphanage.
Junior goes with his father to the offices
for employment most days. Bob is plenty
of company for me, and we take the meals alone
when they are kept out and away.
It is a strain, but we do not need money.

1942

Dearest Lily, I suppose you must also
be lonely though having your grandchild near
must be comfort for you and Jack. Junior has
joined the air force and is in Europe. Robert left
us as soon as he turned sixteen. His destroyer
is somewhere in the South Pacific, small, so
nothing like the ships he worked on in Chester.
He is grateful to you for your kindness then.
I thought that it might cheer you to have his letter:
Dear Mom and Pop, I hope you are swell.
Our ship is tight and full to the gills with men.
I sleep in a hammock but not much. They tell
us boy scouts to forget everything we learned.
Thank Aunt Lillian, she saved up everything I earned.

1944

Now with the boys gone my hours are so lonely,
dear Lil, I have told Jay he must find
another hobby, something he can do in the same room
with me and keep me company. At first he fumed
but I told him I was losing my mind
with worry all these days looking out the window only
so he has left off his tinkering
and taken up embroidery. Already we
have a half dozen tablecloths and pillowcases
quite nice work though not as fine laces
as you might choose. They are useful and pretty
and an answer to his hands, hankering
after occupation. We do not talk much.
I wonder, do your boys stay in touch?

1955

Grace and Jordan Junior were here for Easter with their girls. Although adopted they both, dear Lily, come from good Catholic backgrounds and show no signs of poor breeding. We found them quite polite although I am rather loath to use my good linen or china with them here. Robert's baby seems quite a disappointment. Barely five pounds and such a squaller. I worried that my husband would have no rest after that long drive. Justine did her best but oh, how that child would fuss and holler and they have really such a small apartment. They are all healthy. No grandson, as before, still, I think this is all we can hope for.

1965

Lillian, I think it would be better if you and Jack did not come to see us just now. In truth Jay is not quite alert and does not do well with company. Curt, angry, he battles with the pain with just a few moments rest, each night. Your letter was appreciated as are your prayers.

We are hopeful that he will be accepted in a special Catholic home. It is staffed by nuns. They have control and willingness to give drugs for pain as necessary. We sent the application last month. I do not care if they are narcotics, he must have peace. I wait for that, for rest, at last, relief.

1968

Lillian, I have come to live at Robert's.
I have gone from five rooms to one, packed
everything in boxes on a small truck,
my seventy-five years; so much I took
to neighbors or the Goodwill or trash,
yet even the little I kept, that small bit
left me here is resented. The child will
not speak to me except when spoken to.
She comes home each day with stacks of books
and goes straight into her room. She looks
as if she hates me and life itself. How
am I to get along? Bob's wife works, still,
they do not want me in the kitchen. Truth
be told, it is small, but I could be of use.

1974

Lily, I wish you had lived to see
what a pretty place I have now. We could
be like girls together here. We'd take walks
every day to the little town. Such talks
we could have. It is all so pleasant. I should
have moved here long ago. Here I am free
to make my days as I please. I was never
alone before, you know. I don't remember
mother clearly but we were too many there
certainly and at Miss Ann's I had ever
to be in company and work and busy.
This little place, I am so happy here:
my kitchen, sitting room, my bed chamber.

1985

Really Lillian, I do think you might come
and stay here with me someday. I have not had
a letter from you in some time but I fear
the postman may not have my address clear
since I have come to stay at this hotel. Sad
to say because it is all so refined. Some
of the guests have health problems. There are nurses
here at all hours. I am sure your health
is fine as is mine but in case you have concerns
I mention this. The dining room is lovely, ferns
in pots, lush draperies, but I am rather less
than fond of the bird. Pretty, but he curses!
Can you imagine? And all of us here ladies.
I must have misplaced your letter today.

1992

This, Lily, lace, smooth linen, clean skin, touch
clean and night smooth sleep, Lily, call me, please
if you wake first, stillness, cool, I think sleep
now or was it yesterday I was deep
water cool dark. The ropes, Lily, the trees.
I remember, river, rocks. Sleep, too much,
wake, and the river leaves, its hard roaring,
snow, melt, and winter—they pull us over—
school, we go to school. That was it. Morning.
School. Cable, basket, pulley. Bell warning
and that moment above thunder hover,
Lil, you and I, small, the basket soaring...
Sleep. Slip soon, sweet now, sing Lily, I fed
you strawberries, tender, lace, Mama's bed?