
SESTINA FOR A PANDEMIC

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Rising today, the air is chilled, and the morning sun
Reflects in the dew glistening on the budding leaves.
I hear your voices. Song fills the expanse,
Entering the house between window glass and sill.
First a thin quiver, then ensues a choral arrangement of birdsong.
My feet step to the floor over the bedside.

The sprouting cotyledons have grown first, second, and third leaves
Although only weeks have passed in this expanse
When time is measured now in birdsong.
I rest in the chair at our bedside.
After pushing up the glass above the sill,
I listen to the humid evening marked by the setting sun.

Now in the third month since this began, a measured expanse
Of homeschool and cooking, of coffee and birdsong,
I watch you and your mate outside my sill.
I watch the way you carry threads to build your bedside.
Each day you fly away and back with the sun.
I mark the hours by walking out to check the new blooms under the leaves.

I dig into hard earth wearing a hat to ward off the sun,
and children's voices create a constant background filling the expanse
Within our house, yard, and streets. No space here for a quiet bedside.
Ambulance sirens wail alongside the shiver of leaves,
And a timer rings intrusion. A computer sings an electronic birdsong.
Seeking repose, I shut the window to meet the sill.

Tonight thunder wakes me in this season of birdsong.
The sky flashing alight, I reach to the lamp along the bedside.
I wonder, how many hours until the sun?
One hand to the left twists the switch, and one reaches right to feel for his expanse.
His even snores are barely audible through the crashing outside the sill
As streaks illuminate the blackness and needed rain falls upon the leaves.

As summer comes and strange spring gives way to endless sun
I lie here twisted in sheets, sweating, catching my breath, as in the expanse
Below the windowpane the paint peels along the sill.

The heat of the day is rising, and the garden beckons me to part the leaves
To check for hornworms, aphids, and squash bugs, whose bedside
Within the plants seems more urgent than before. I rise to a morning rich with birdsong.

These days at home have been bizarre, exhausting, yet magical. Birdsong
comes with the sun and open sill. Blinking awake, sleepy at his bedside,
Our lives turn a corner, opening and narrowing into an unexpected expanse between leaves.

Author Biography

Julianna (she/her) is an education researcher, writer, and teacher in Norman, Oklahoma. Julianna studies expertise development within language and literacy learning. In August 2022 she will join the faculty at the University of Oklahoma as an Assistant Professor of English Education. Reach out to Julianna at julianna.kershen@gmail.com and @juliannaelk.

