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Origami Poetry Project

Pick A Color
 @ Bill Sullivan, 2011

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The single minded ones
 demand that we choose:
 the red rose or the white
 rose, black or white skin
 blue or grey cloth, green
 or orange flag.
 We could join the fray,
 watch the colors clash
 and hear the swords clang
 and the rifles ring,
 sniff the cannon's smoke
 feel between our fingers
 the blood soaked soil.
 Or we could sit and sink
 into Rothko's rectangles and bands
 painted in colors no clan can claim,
 in hues and shadings that whisper
 our shared sensitivities: tragedy
 and doom beauty and ecstasy.

Pick a Color

The diploma had no jagged edges, no rips,
 was tied neatly with a red bow, so I assumed
 that it contained praise, priceless advice,
 even a few lofty Latin phrases. Instead I stared
 at a relentless whiteness that tacitly shouted,
 "Heed the colorless canvas in front of you."
 Pressing finger and thumb on each end
 of the enigmatic scroll so it would not recoil
 I eyed the visual riddle. Was it testing what I
 had learned? The ominous whale was white;
 watch for the white smoke; stick with white lies
 and white magic; never fly the white flag
 or buy a white elephant; avoid a white out
 and white bread; pray for a white knight
 to save the queen; don't shoot until you see
 the white of their eyes. Hope that the white
 blood cells stem the tide that you never look
 as bloodless, as white, as a ghost.
 Or did the parchment foretell that I was
 bound to navigate white waters without a chart
 or compass; without a white book to guide me
 through those white knuckle encounters?

White

Red

You never wore red before, she said.
 True, I replied but silently wondered why.
 Well you should, she said, eyeing my tie.
 I will since I no longer dread red, I said

Not to pry, but why now and not then, she asked.
 I can't answer that in a flash, I said.
 Take your time she said but do complete the task
 Since you insist, hear the whys of my pale past:

Although red shouts stop and heed this alert
 and lets you know something is too hot to touch
 and colors our losses and paints every rebel,
 all that baggage, I said, never bothered me much.

It was the nuns' nonsense that made me cringe.
 Red, they said was the hue of the devil's kin.
 Ponder the thorns piercing his bleeding heart.
 and pair scarlet sex with sin, they said.

Happily those shackles didn't hold, she said.
 The body's eye, I said routed those deep noes
 and raised a red flag over righteous resistance.
 Now I can sense red's essence, its amorous glow.

Red, she said, can kindle a spark, even a flame,
 so let's both wear red and try to fuel a fire.
 That, I said, has always been my secret desire
 so let's let red on red stoke the blaze higher.

I could never warm up to yellow.
 Try as it might one coat rarely covers
 up all those streaks, smudges and stains
 and even if it did we know what lurks
 beneath the bright paint.
 Granted, if I had to live in a submarine
 yellow might do in the midst of midnight
 blue-one hue bouncing off the other
 at the bottom of the stark sea.
 But picture yourself fifty feet from the light
 which suddenly turns yellow-caution it bares
 but offers no advice as to stop or go. And what
 if you, like that equivocating Dane, constantly
 asked should I or shouldn't I. What would be
 lost in all your hesitations? At least
 with red and green we know
 what we should but may not do.

Yellow