

ELIZABETH COLEMAN

With All Faults

Any grievous traits bequeathed
to them—progenitor
malfeasance: my children are
a tender offer.

Nolle prosequi, nolo contendere.

I seek no homestead exemption
from my parents'
findings: the modern world,
a forum non conveniens.

Obiter dictum, pendente lite.

And you, my coconspirator, came
without a guarantee; no warranty
of fitness for intended
purpose or habitability.

Ipse dixit, ipso facto, J.N.O.V.

Oliveria at Dusk

My friends and I drink, chat on our front porch;
each wants to show herself the most successful one;
forgetting that these trees have heard it all
before: the shrillness at times of the human
voice, the pointlessness of which one of us won;
our lazy failing to hear quiet's call;

or study all the greens Fir Mountain bears.
Each seems to be unfurled across the way,
beyond the stream, serene, unaware
of pouring water down the hill all day.
It's not just the varieties of tone,
but also shapes and sizes, long, round, short
—a fan, an almost five-point star, a cone—
a stylish, silent flair, a subtle forte.

Fir Mountain

The porch protects
the house from cold, the way I said I'd shut
my heart to you.

But
the door
blew open; now I see my mountain loom.

Your laughter was a Buddhist bell
calling the monks to prayer; and
your wit was mountainous.

On summer nights,
I open all the windows, so that
from my room I hear Esopus flow.

And if I rise before first light, I see
her: arms folded, not unlike a mother,
bossy against the sky.

On Poets' Walk

the lone saxophonist
belts out a standard I heard years ago;
my father played it on the piano,
in a red jacket, daring at the time.

I pass toy boats on the pond
like one he guided in his pool;
at Strawberry Fields I think of John
Lennon's too short time on earth, and
dad's; the latter, of course, not well known.
It's small consolation that his signet ring
I've worn forty years will become my son's,
and survive by many generations
strewn trash that roams, slovenly,
among the park's bronze-gold hued leaves.