



**Blues  
for French Roast  
with Chicory**

POEMS

**Martina Reisz Newberry**

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with Chicory**

POEMS

Martina Reisz Newberry

With a Foreword by Michael Arcangelini

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The blues . . .  
like that problem child  
that you may have had in the family.  
You was a little bit ashamed to  
let anybody see him, but you loved him.  
You just didn't know how other people would take it.  
—B. B. King

“And you became like the coffee,  
In the deliciousness,  
and the bitterness  
and the addiction.”  
—Mahmoud Darwish

It's summer dark  
the night is quiet and close  
the chair is warm from the day's heat  
There are stars in my coffee cup.  
—Martina Reisz Newberry

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I believe I've known Martina Reisz Newberry for well over 10 years. Known in that odd way we have become accustomed to these days; without ever having been in the same room together. We became friends over the internet. Initially on a kind of poet's listserv, then through e-mail, snail mail, and now with social media added to the mix. I have been reading and following her poetry the whole time and for me the release of a new book of Martina's work is always an event of note. And so it is with *Blues for French Roast with Chicory*.

Herein you will find poems in which the sky can break into jigsaw puzzle pieces and fall to the ground, the setting winter sun apologizes for leaving homeless people still cold, and a skyfull of stars consider their own mortality.

These are poems full of magic and ghosts: the corpulent ghost with "a thunderstorm of a smile" in the title poem and the "great ghosts" of *Geodes*. Or the magic can be as simple as the transcendence of snow falling expressed by one who's never seen it fall.

Current events creep into these pages in the form of politics (*Me and Amy Lowell*), nuclear contamination (*Act of Retrieval*), and California's wind-driven wildfires. In fact strong winds, primarily the seasonal Santa Ana, blow through many of these poems stirring and clearing the air around them and the reader.

In *Morning Glories* she advises us that: "all sins / are forgiven as long as you / keep the closet door closed." But hope is always flowing beneath the horrors and fears of life like a nourishing underground river. Even among the ruminations and meditations orbiting her 70<sup>th</sup> birthday she celebrates life and hope in poems both poignant and wise.

This poet, who touches us with "fingers like song lyrics" and speaks though the "battered blades of my lips," has produced another collection of wonders to loose upon the world and for that I am grateful. You will be, too.

Michael J. Arcangelini



## **Blues for French Roast with Chicory**



## **Passing A Deserted High School In The Nuclear Sunshine Of A Fall Afternoon**

13

I ought to study signs and portents.  
Had I known that the feather I picked  
up outside the grounds of the high school  
on Sunset Boulevard would lift me  
above the football field and take me back  
to those dreadful days, I'd have never  
picked it up. They stand for ascension,  
you know, Feathers do. The chanting of  
wraith cheerleaders rang loud in my ears.  
my stomach folded in on itself.  
I hit the ground running. It was not  
a day for flying. Had I known that  
rocking an empty chair brought bad luck,  
I'd never have touched our old rocker  
to hear it creak. This is the reason  
I lost my wallet when I bent down  
to pick up that damn feather. It was,  
I tell you, not a day for bending down  
in front of deserted high schools on  
the first day of Fall's disappointments.

**“Rachel Is Weeping For Her Children . . .”***Jeremiah 31:15*

I imagine I can see  
the scratched and scarred places on  
my children’s bodies.  
They are the places where I  
used to live. Look carefully

and you’ll see my ghost, looking  
for the rest of my family,  
for that other life  
I thought I would have. Careless  
dreams—curious larceny.

I read them like books, thumbing  
through their pages that did not  
love me—loved others—  
but not the smiling, passive  
woman who seemed only to REact

instead of grabbing the bull  
by its proverbial horns  
(a pithy observation),  
and running for those famous  
hills, their little hides in tow.

Oh, I have been penitent  
all my life— all of their lives—  
far from paradise,  
further still from lenity,  
landed under the spaces

in their memories, waving,  
calling out to their bodies  
“Here I am. See me.  
In spite of your memories,  
I am more than your laments.”

I see you turning in your bed,  
you itch everywhere and there  
are no bedbugs, no fleas, no insects.  
Something does this to you each  
and every night. It is not love.

It is certainly not peace.

I see you at the kitchen sink.  
You are washing the sink.  
It's not dirty and you spilled nothing into it.  
But you see filth each and every day  
that you come to the sink.

It is not Obsessive/Compulsive Syndrome.

I see you lying by the pool.  
You are slick with tanning oil.  
There is no sun. The sun left long ago  
when times got tough and people got  
greedy and ate the sun. Now there is only gray light.

It is not fog.

I see you holding the head of your  
last lover in your hands. It is not a fake.  
It is a totem. You keep it next to your reclining  
chair in front of the T.V. The smile  
on the face of your last lover

is not a pleasant keepsake.

I see you at the dining room table.  
You are not eating there. You are not  
making a scrapbook. You are drawing  
a picture on the table. You dip your finger  
in mayonnaise and draw boxes  
in three dimensions.

I see you at the aquarium. You are watching  
 the sharks make circles as if  
 they were in the sea. You tap on the glass.  
 They don't acknowledge you.  
 You tap dance. You scream at them. You spit.

No one notices.

I see you at the altar. You are fingering  
 a chalice made of clay. You are eating sticks of incense,  
 lighting them first, then eating them  
 When you speak, smoke comes  
 from your nose and mouth.

*Incensum istud a te benedictum,  
 ascendat ad re, Domine,  
 et descendat super nos misericordia  
 tua.*

*May this incense blessed by You,  
 arise before You, O Lord, and may  
 Your mercy come down upon us.*

I see you turning in your bed, you itch everywhere  
 and there are no bedbugs, no fleas. Something does this  
 to you each and every night. It is not love. It is certainly not peace.  
 You scratch a final time and lay quiet.  
 Now you understand everything.

*Et verbum caro factum est et  
 Habitabit in nobis*

*And the word was made flesh and  
 dwelt among us.*

## Discernment

*for Larry Kramer, Poet (in loving memory)*

I don't understand snow,  
never having lived  
in snowy climes.

I don't depend on what  
is underneath it  
to reappear in Spring.

I don't feel its curved  
silence or relish  
the perfection of every flake.

I haven't seen a pink  
sunrise reflecting off  
it or the intense contrast

between the night sky  
and the white ground.  
I've not known snowy fields

or spiked angry branches  
with piled snow.  
I am better acquainted

with strong winds  
below the canyons and  
the crystalline heat

that follows— a calm  
that speaks of ghosts  
and lost loves.

I am far more intimate  
with air so cold you  
cannot leave it outside,

but can only bring it  
with you from your  
bones into your house.

The voice of snow  
must be very different  
from the voice of dry winds

and canyons . . . soprano  
rather than alto and  
basso profundo.

And, since I have  
not heard it trilling  
and falling so light

on the ground, I can only  
wish it well and continue  
to embrace what I know.

Often, as I undressed, you said,  
“Take your time and hurry.”  
I did and your overwhelmingly white smile  
sparked and twinkled at me—an invitation to the dance,  
a *jeté assemblé* into the banquet—and, later,  
carnage without tears, sacrifice & homage  
to a madonna’s brief time on earth.

**Sea Shanty**

The shyness which took 50 years  
for me to grow out of returned on  
the arm of my 70th birthday.  
Since then, and once again, I am  
the quintessential sea anemone.  
I fold into myself as time, events  
and beauty run by.  
Their breezes touch me and  
I withdraw, shoulders hunching,  
toes/fingers curling, hair shrinking  
into my scalp. Ashamed and not  
knowing (knowing) *why*.

**WHITE ROAD**

*Men che dramma di sangue m'è rimaso, che non tremi.\**

*Don't throw me no drag, now she said.*

I don't, I won't.

While you still hear me, I'll tell  
my tales as candidly as I can.

These are wretched times;  
times that poems can not fix  
and we are living them.

We are stricken with lies  
and food that leaves us hungry  
and the vivid marks of war  
like stripes on the backs of our souls.

This is what I ask of you:  
that you stay to the end of this poem—  
at least this one.

While you still hear me,  
there are things you should know:  
they may be bruised,  
but there are still apples, tart and cool from a tree  
and while the sky is definitely falling, there are,  
now and then,  
patches of beryl, cerulean, and iceberg  
still haunting it.

We are not kissed by fortune  
nor blessed by happenstance  
so there is reason to fear  
and, that being said,  
while they may be hardened  
by work, by slavery, by rancor or pain  
there are still hands, warm caresses on our heads.

And, while the nourishment of good sex  
is undervalued,

and turned sometimes into revenge,  
the bare calves of a lover beneath a quilt  
still sustain and condole.

I'll throw you no drag, no matter what.  
I say live, even precariously, even sadly.  
Live, you who are left to listen,  
as though the notion of life intrigues you,  
as if living is all there is to do  
even as it remains a velleity.