

Couriers of Silence

by Michael Alan Brich

An evening on a spray painted park bench.

I throw crumbs of stale bread to the trees.

She walks up.

Stops and stands

like a shaft of rain.

She remembers my name.

It hasn't been that long.

I feel disheveled.

I try to straighten the wrinkles I'm wearing.

She loses the safety of the wrong words:

What's happened to you?

Something's different.

Her forehead is wet.

I stuff a scream in my mouth.

I look down at my feet.

Even my shoes are wrinkled.

She walks away.

Her thighs spin the evening into the past.

Into a night of speaking that never happened.

A week later, I'm at our favorite restaurant.

The only one we went to twice.

She is there. I walk over to her table.

A painting of a mouth sewn shut hangs behind her.

Thick black stitches like spider legs.

I can't tell if she speaks or just lifts her hair.

The taste of metal rises in my throat.

The taste of words gone rancid.

I take a step back and she leaves.

I sit at the bar and pretend it's her table.

Scoreboards flicker on televisions above me.

Someone is winning.

Someone is losing.

Other men stand around me

like crows in their trenchcoat robes.

We are the couriers of silence

raising glasses and bottles to dusty lips.

I try to write words on the bar

with the sweat of my glass for ink.

My straw the pen.

The words don't come out right.

Strings of never ending consonants.

Vowels overlapping other vowels

becoming a knotted web of themselves.