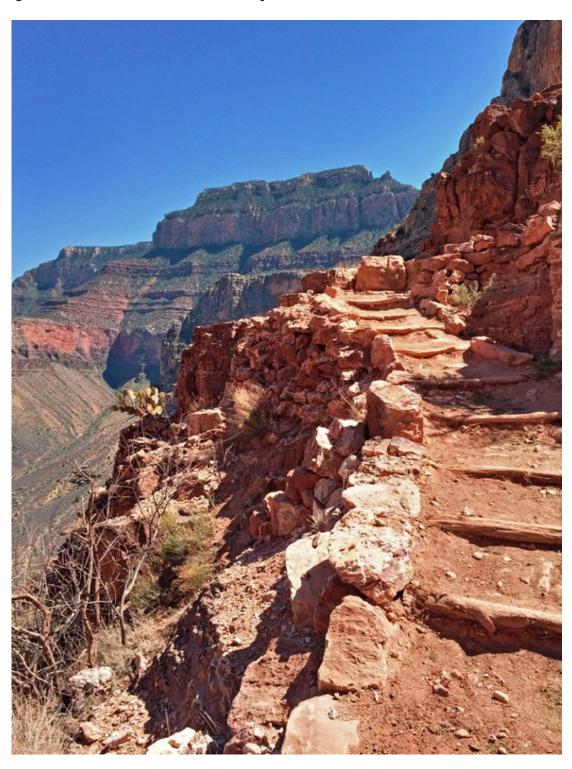
Stairwell Leads

By <u>Diane Webster</u> (April 2024)



Stairwell Leads

The stairwell leads down smaller, smaller, narrower, narrower into a slit canyon of walls so tight only air, water squeeze through, through to the darkness below where ollie, ollie, oxen free! echoes into a no man's land.

The stairwell climbs up expanding as it ascends into a sky offering horizon to horizon blue of sunshine or a dome of stars rotating with earth where one breathes full, exhales particles of millennial dust gathered from the plaster walls left behind, below, a ripple of echo no longer heard.

Marble Musings

A block of marble outlines the squinty fossil of a mermaid tail curved to her left as she lounges on a rock at the sea's edge to admire the horizon merge with the sunset.

A sarcophagus sealed against looters with only

the lid a hint of what's hidden inside, the mermaid vacuum packed in tins of cat food ready to feed feral hordes gathering as disciples of the saint someday reborn.

Fighting for Freedom

A soldier's statue stands stories high on high rise ledge. He gazes over the city as the sun rises and wishes he could raise his hand to shade eyes from the glare. His left knee bends in anticipation of the next step, next step off the ledge.

But the punishment freezes, forever granite solid between step or no step; stands for decades of erosion, plunges to shattered remains ground to sand to abrade, to saw constrains like prison bars of other city statues tired of idolness.

Pine Tree Shadows

Needles abandoned the pine tree long ago leaving barren branches outstretched for sparrows.

Sparrows fly in; late parishioners scooting into pews hoping God and everyone pretends not to notice.

They sing, a chorus of praise to the sunrise, blue sky, and mountain air.

Individual pine cones imitate mountain sparrows as they cling and pray to the pine tree.

Release them
with the hopes
a stray seed
captures the earth
in root strength
to grow needles
rising to the sky.

Rolls

Oscar taps tobacco
onto a cigarette paper
as thin as his white hair.
He rolls
outer around inner
with decades experience
and licks the paper
to seal the deal.
A match flares sending
sulphur into his nostrils;
a flame lights his cigarette,
and Oscar inhales,
exhales smoke
combing through his hair
like a lover's fingers.

Mom spreads out dough,
dabs butter all around,
sprinkles cinnamon,
raisins, brown sugar.
She rolls the mixture
with practiced fingers
and seals the edges
with swipes of water.
With butcher precision
she slices slabs from the whole,
lays them on a cookie sheet.
While baking, the aroma wafts
through the air like perfume
luring a look.

Table of Contents

Diane Webster's work has appeared in *El Portal, North Dakota Quarterly, New English Review, Verdad* and other literary magazines. She had a micro-chap published by *Origami Poetry Press* in 2022, 2023 and 2024. One of Diane's poems was nominated for Best of the Net in 2022. Diane retired in 2022 after 40 years in the newspaper industry.

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