

Letter to Jeanne from Nevada

Eli Coyle

Dear Jeanne: “It’s a world of play and there are lots of ways.”

Do you remember when I chased you down
after the first day of class and asked,

“Can one make a living as a poet?”

You told me that your mother had been asking you that
for the last thirty years. I think you’d like it here
in Reno. The high desert sun

with all the Vedic threads unspooled and spun,
an unraveling of winged thoughts and creatures.

Oh, and the birds, you’ve expressed these poems
of observation before—

I recently read a Sean Hill poem
and remembered when he came to our class, and after
how he mistook my name for the guy in front of me.

Now I have a scratched out “Dear Jason”
at the beginning of his first book.

I’m reading Hass and Hirshfield again, those California poets—
and how I was too late into the thesis to bring in Snyder.

Could you imagine if one could make a living
as a poet? Lately, I’ve been running along the edges of this desert.

Mostly living free, I recently had a dream

I was a tan mustang in a prairie sea. My obsidian mane
blowing manic in the wind. My muscular body
barreling unhinged, a cosmic wind in onyx eyes
becoming void in a turning sky.

Could you imagine if one could make a living as a poet?

I’ve recently thought of you as a dream
in the names of birds—quail and robin,
red-tail and dove silhouetted in the sun.

The days are getting shorter and the yellow eyes of owl
have returned, an omen to the undying night
of high desert tucking light.

Tell me again what Alberto Rios used to tell you,
or paint me in the changing trees
of pencil shavings in the streets. All love in lines.

Your student. Eli