

## Les Brown – Three Poems

### Her Hat

Mother wore her broad brimmed straw hat  
    in summer's sunshine  
when she weeded dahlias,  
    irises, snap dragons and zinnias,  
taking it off only  
    to wipe her sweating brow,  
or to savor the sweetness  
    of the roses her mother had given her.

When cloud and thunder came  
    she hung it  
on a nail by the door,  
    sat on her front porch,  
watching, blessing the freshening rain  
    while waiting  
for the sun's return.

As days grew short  
    and winter came,  
silent snow covering bud and leaf,  
    bending her to its will  
driving her inside, she placed  
    her hat on top of the dusty armoire  
in her dark cold bedroom.

### Before the Lines

The flashlight sitting deep on a closet shelf  
belonged to my father. It was his and his alone.  
    He used it to light his way  
    to the barn before sunrise,  
    to see in plank-crack dimness,  
    to milk our brindled cow.  
He used it when lightning struck at night,  
to search for match and lamp  
    to dim-light our house  
    the way he had before  
    the lines were hung.  
    He said, "Leave it alone  
so I'll know where it is to keep you safe."

And then he died. I heard his words  
each time I saw the flashlight  
that no one would touch,  
even when it sat  
corroded in a pool of acid.

## Once More

We go again to the clear pool  
on Stillhouse Branch  
where I learned to swim  
naked with older cousins,  
where I took you, my new bride,  
to nature's rockbound pool  
sloping down from July-hot rocks  
into green depths where crayfish  
crawled over angular scree.

Easy on agile young legs,  
the way tests our aged joints  
and lost balance. We step with care  
on leaf-slick ledge, cling to limb,  
place hands down where  
young feet stepped with abandon.  
We tell each other to take care,  
for the journey is much further  
home than it was back then.

Reaching the pool at last  
we shed our clothes,  
wade slowly into the chilling  
mirror-water that once wrinkled  
young fingers and toes.  
We hold each other's hands  
a while for surety of footing,  
then swim the length and back  
to lie side by side on warm rocks.

**Les Brown**, A native of the mountains of North Carolina, is professor emeritus at Gardner-Webb University. He has published poetry and short stories in several journals, including *Pinesong*, *Kakalak*, *Moonshine Review*, *Pine Mountain Sand and Gravel*, *Flying South*, *Poetry in Plain Sight* and *Streetlight Magazine*. A Pushcart Nominee, Les's book, *A Place Where Trees Had Names*, was published by *Redhawk Publications*, 2020. He lives in Troutman, North Carolina.