

Roxanne Cardona – Three Poems

Why I Understand Albert

He crawls across the canopy
of the boy's bathroom. Coils
of hair dampen his scalp. He stares

into the ceiling as if it were a sky
made with plaster clouds. Albert hooks
his calves around copper pipes, warm

to the touch. I wonder at their strength
to shoulder this boy, taller than most
ten-year-olds. He recites a cartoon anthem,

*Is he strong? Listen Bud. He's got radioactive
blood.* I hold down a holler he can't fall.
I ask him in a whispered cry

to get down, he unwraps his arm to jail me
with a spider web only he can see.
Sings in a voice, clear as a black-capped

chickadee, *Am I strong? Listen,
Principal, I've got radioactive blood.*
Albert drops to the floor

in measured steps, his mouth a stalled confession.
Glides by me, banana-walks
into his classroom, shoots pretend webs,

with a *shush, shush, shush,*
like the arachnid he idols. I too have read
Spiderman. Thrilled by his capers,

crouching onto office towers upside down.
Webbing up evildoers. Especially that.
Sketched him battling Doctor Octopus,

aiding his Aunt May. Albert squeezes
past legs and desks, opens a book,
discards all consequences.

Head of School, Should You Be Afraid?

No matter, you are a coward.
Sniveling, charm-wearing, yellow satin
slipped coward. Look, how you hold
the speech in your hands. See the quiver
of paper. That's you. Your pulse dances
on top of two moving lips, stands in
the white-hot light of blame.

Hold the microphone like a cool pistol,
You know what the parents want.
Know what they want to see.
You, a crumbling mess of a building.
They want radical surgery. To slice
open that suit jacket, tear off your blouse
expose what lies beneath the skin.

To loosen the stomach,
scissor your twisted heart till it
slow beats alone on this stage.
Let them shout. Let them take pictures.
Smile widely for them, do not
acknowledge you are their game bird
turning on a spit. Soften your look,

root out indignation, push away
disappointment. You have seen this
story before, you never thought it would
happen to you. Eyes, hundreds of them
beam up at you like forks, their mouths
seamed slits of condemnation. They're here
to yell, *Bully school. Stand up to bullies.*

Turn their anger inside out,
sweep cowardice out
of the building, carve a new school
out of this night. Tell the parents,
in your own true voice,
*Your children are safe with me.
So safe.*

In the Hawk's Claw

Hidden among the dark ropes of the sugar
maple, I watch a red-tailed hawk. Rocking. Side

to side. It releases a cry, as if a thing wounded.
It cries in triumph. Hunger. Beneath it a rock pigeon,

hostage of the hawk's hooked talons. Still alive it blinks
its eyes, opens up its bill, its warm breath

the only thing that would escape this morning.
Seven AM, the hour of remembering, someone

watched me. As I crossed 182nd street,
my fourteen-year-old chest wrapped in lavender

cotton, my feet heeled in brown oxford leather.
As I climbed the three stone steps to the school doors,

stomach covered with textbooks and a three-ring
loose-leaf, someone watched. Our last day

of commencement practice, I stepped in front
of a girl tall as a mansion door. Showed her

my wide smile. She watched. I did not know her.
Or the two muscled arms she dropped

on my shoulders. I wiggled to release her grip.
She leaned in. I smelled musk from her underarms,

Aqua Net hairspray that gripped her tight
curls, the sticky feel of it on my neck.

Her eyes, the temperature of water before
it freezes. I slipped into the body of that pigeon,

opened my lungs, let out air, warm
as steam till it whistled, till it screamed, till it cried.

Roxanne Cardona was born in New York City of Puerto Rican heritage. She has had poems published in *Mason Street*, *Constellations*, *Red Eft Review*, *Door is A Jar*, *Writing in a Woman's Voice*, *Poetic Medicine-New Voices* and elsewhere. She has a BA/MS from Hunter College, MS from College of New Rochelle. She was an elementary school

teacher and principal in the South Bronx. Roxanne resides in Teaneck, NJ, with her husband.