

Blues Walking Like a Woman

After Robert Johnson

Though she once studied violin, some summer days she plays the ukulele and invites children to sit on her blanket the color of cherries beneath the sycamore tree in Youngstown Park—outside the cemetery that has one division for Jews, another for the old white men who founded this little town and smaller markers for the mothers and their infants who died just beyond the womb. Here and there flags where soldiers came home from wars in pieces. Those days she believes she is kind-hearted.

When the world sucks her down, when she's sure she is so evil that dust on her broom scares her, she walks in an old black coat and running shoes worn at the heels and goes nowhere near that river-view cemetery. Her ukulele leans against her bed. The children stay inside the school where the playground lines on the basketball court wear away and a pole has no tether ball.

Last week she got caught in a downpour, a righteous wet-your-hair-in-seconds rain. No need to hurry, nowhere to go, never encouraged to loiter under the front porch at the school (though no one would arrest her if she did), she stares into the sky of rain. Lets her eyelids drain where tears go. That water doesn't drown her blues, not at all. It runs into her mouth. She licks her lips. Rain in her ears; she remembers her grandfather's collection of big conches that remember all waves that flow into her heart until she finds her lonesome words, kitchen cabinet words where wet dishcloths hang, and she hums bless-a-my-morning, bless-a-my noon, bless-a-my-night, I won't go home until I drink these blues – a bent-note song she made up on a better day when she last walked her ukulele out to play.

This Vagrant Knows Ancient

So she claims, mentions rock walls,
false teeth and playgrounds
with cracks sprawled with chicory.

She can tell you about an eclipse,
a hippy wedding in a be-ribboned woods
at the end of a potholed gravel road,

a dog that loves bananas, a stabbing,
and drought. Her left foot drags a bit,
her right elbow aches before lightning.

She reads headlines in newspaper stands
to jumble the words into sentences
that may or may not make sense.

She has a tattoo on one knee
of a spider web, would never do that
again. Images of Buddha calm her

as he does not look directly at her.
As for vagrant, she claims a heritage
not unlike patternless dolphin migrations,

loves words that rhyme with fragrant
and that give her the chance to do
something as well as men do.

Tricia Knoll is a Vermont poet. Her work appears widely in journals and anthologies. Her collected poems include *Urban Wild*, *Broadfork Farm*, *Ocean's Laughter*, *How I Learned to Be White* and *Checkered Mates*. *How I Learned To Be White* received the 2018 Indie Book Award for Motivational Poetry. For more, visit triciaknoll.com. She lives on unceded Abenaki land. Her new chapbook *Checkered Mates* from Kelsay Books is now available from Kelsay Books and Amazon. **Website:** triciaknoll.com, **twitter:** [@triciaknollwind](https://twitter.com/triciaknollwind), [Amazon author page](#).