

POETRY CORNER

The Matchbox

By Barbara Yates • barbara.yates4@icloud.com

Festive temple courtyard
 Filled with food stands and the new year talismans
 There on the giveaway table, an ancient matchbox,
 With the image of an angel sewing on her wings; perfect
 I picked it up and sat under a nearby paulownia tree
 wondering how
 I could sew, no manual dexterity graces my fingers; pause for
 a paradigm
 When a cosmic tailor sat beside me and gave me a golden
 needle, saying
 "It's not that hard, once you get over yourself."
 Suddenly, there was a pair of off-white wings with sturdy
 pin feathers
 "See, here is where you make a stitch," guiding my attempt to
 Attach some meaning to my good fortune,
 To be here, sewing on my wings on such a fine New Year's Day.
 I love this gift, starting small, growing, expanding....
 The sun was setting behind the west wall, when
 The temple priest stopped by and said "It's a nice souvenir, that
 old matchbox."
 "Indeed," I smiled as I stood, gave him a bow, and
 Walked with wings into the new year.

Barbara Summerhawk (Yates) makes migratory flights from her home in Kiyose, Japan, where she writes poetry and stargazes, and from cabbage patches to her cabin on Humbug, where she strolls along the stream looking for answers.

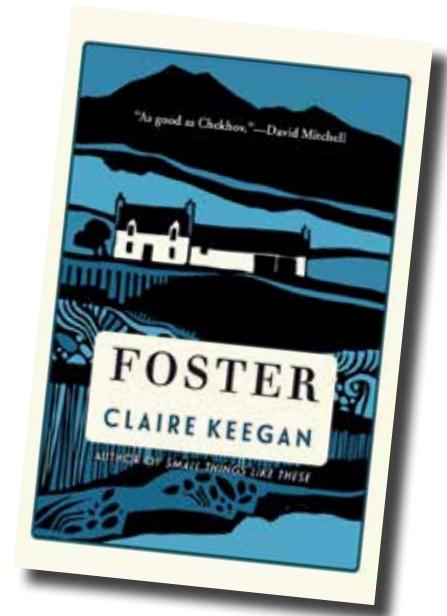
Have a submission for Poetry Corner, either written by an Applegate resident or about the Applegate? Email it to *Applegater* poetry editor Paul Tipton at ptipton4u2c@gmail.com.

BOOK REVIEW

Foster and other books and short stories by Claire Keegan

Grove Press
 New York 2010, 2022

BY CHRISTIN LORE WEBER



Spring is a busy time, with preparing and planting gardens, weed whacking, washing windows, and all the rest. Can reading a book fit into the agenda?

"Short and easy," I think, picking up *Foster* to reread as I settle into my overstuffed chair. 97 pages. A novella. Perfect.

I open it. Oh yes! For 97 pages of time, I get to be a child again. I will see everything in the story through the eyes and with the emotions of a ten-year-old whose name I won't learn at all in the first chapter. When she is spoken to, she's called "girl."

This is a story of two families and a girl between them. Her father is about to drop her off at his sister-in-law's. We are in Ireland. We know this from the dialect and how the house and land look from the girl's eyes. She sees everything and says little. She ponders in silence all she sees but doesn't say. For instance, she considers the difference between her father and her uncle, observing them from the old car: "It is something I am used to, this way men have of not talking: they like to kick a divot out of the grass with a boot heel, to slap the roof of a car before it takes off, to spit, to sit with their legs wide apart, as though they do not care" (page 7).

This is the experience of a girl who can't be kept at home: they can't feed her, what with another baby on the way. Early that same day, she heard her Mammy and Da talking about the arrangement. The dialogue is short and taut, without "he said; she said," but we can keep up with it: "How long should they keep her?"

Can't they keep her as long as they like? Is that what I'll say? my father said. Say what you like. Sure, isn't it what you always do?" (page 8).

Now here she is, and her aunt has come to fetch her from the car. Her father is bragging to her uncle about the amount of hay he has. We hear her thinking, "I

wonder why my father lies about the hay. He is given to lying about things that would be nice, if they were true.... Part of me wants my father to leave me here while another part of me wants him to take me back, to what I know. I am in a spot where I can neither be what I always am nor turn into what I could be" (page 9).

The nuance here is strong. I begin to read the story, already thinking it might break my heart. There I'll be, inside this young girl who so far doesn't seem to have a name, knowing very little about what will happen to her or how she will feel about it, but already aching over her future, already sorry for her pregnant mother and suspecting her father of things I don't even want to think about. I'm hooked. I love the girl.

I read the entire story in one evening. I am in tears at the end—happy? Sad? I won't tell.

As a writer of stories, Claire Keegan has this power, this magic, this talent, this skill. *Foster* is my favorite and is the one I'll probably read many more times in my life, but Keegan has more books. I've read *Small Things Like These* and *Antarctica*, and I'm looking forward to *Walk the Blue Fields* and *So Late in the Day*. Her books are deceptively simple, with subtle twists that grab hold of your heart and mind, tangle your sense of what should be and should not be, and linger in memory along with that eternal question, "Why?"

Keegan's books can be found in libraries and bookstores both local and online.

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Authors!

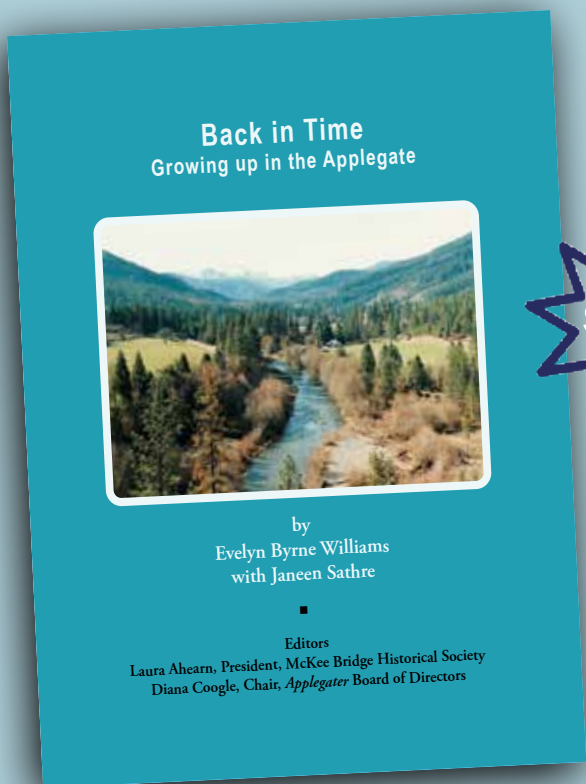
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\$20

A compilation of 50 "Back in Time" articles, by Evelyn Byrne Williams with Janeen Sathre, previously published in the *Applegater* newsmagazine.

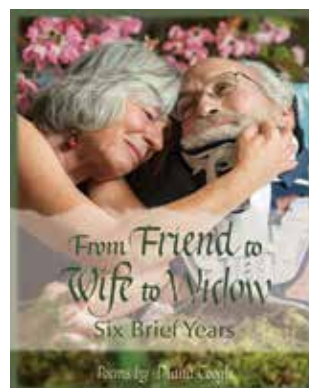
Available at Rebel Heart Books, applegater.org, or contact Lisa Baldwin at leb.97527@gmail.com. When shipped, add \$5. All proceeds benefit the *Applegater*.

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