

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

*Edited & Introduced by Wesley McNair,
Maine Poet Laureate*

How could a prisoner who suddenly achieved the freedom he long desired become so disconsolate that he committed suicide? Robin Merrill, of Madison, explores this question, making us think again about the meanings of freedom and confinement.

Out Here

by Robin Merrill

I know why he killed himself.
You know, the old man
who spent thirty years
trying to break out of prison
and his last two
aching to get back in.
I know him, how he missed
that cold comfort of gray.
I too, have seen colors to be scary.
I know why he carved his name
in the headboard at the boarding house
before he swallowed the stolen pills.
For thirty years they barked his name.
He hasn't heard it since. After living
the same day over and over,
regimen and routine,
now he wakes without schedule.
There are no friends here.
There is no family.
He left all of that behind.
Though he didn't know it then,
prison gave him purpose.
It's lonely out here.

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