

TAKE HEART

A Conversation in Poetry

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

An important challenge for poets in each generation is to renew verse forms inherited from the past. Here Portland's Betsy Sholl, departing from her characteristic free verse, updates the villanelle with an entirely new subject matter.

Doing Time

by Betsy Sholl

They call me Babe and make a kissing noise
from inside their bars and inside their rage.
Most of them are men, though they act like boys

who've played too hard and broken all their toys.
Now they're trying to break their metal cage.
They yell out Babe, make that loud kissing noise

as if their catcalls mean they have a voice
routines and bells can't break. "It's just a phase,"
their parents must have said when they were boys.

Don't ask what they're in for; let them enjoy
their small audience, their short time on stage:
"Hey, Babe, how about?"--then that kissing noise.

In class they want to rhyme, their way to destroy
all evidence of anguish on the page.
They can't bear to remember being boys.

Some study law, some use another ploy,
daydreaming they'll do time, but never age.
"Hey, Babe," means "kiss off" to that cellblock noise,
to broken men, in here since they were boys.

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