

# TAKE HEART

## A Conversation in Poetry

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

Betsy Sholl, the former poet laureate of our state, writes that this week's poem "came out of an actual experience at the main post office in Portland," where she heard a little voice that grew larger as she thought about it.

### Alms

*by Betsy Sholl*

Small as a fly bump, the little voice  
behind me calling *Miss, Miss*, wanted  
a dollar, maybe for food as she said

in that voice of mist, so plaintive  
and soft it could have come from inside  
my own head, a notch below whisper,  
voice of pocket lint, frayed button hole,

voice of God going gnat small. I shivered  
and stopped. I looked for the source,  
and there it was again, *Miss*, so slight

it wobbled moth-like on air,  
up from a bare trash-filled recess  
beside the post office steps. Yes,  
I gave the dollar. But I had seven

in my wallet, so clearly that voice  
wasn't small enough, still someone  
else's sorrow, easy to brush off,

till later that night, in bed, I heard it  
again, smaller—*miss, miss*, little fly strafe  
troubling sleep—not a name at all,  
but a failure, a lack, a lost chance.

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