

Two Poems

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Second Marriage

Mortar joints are intended
to be sacrificial, sensitive
toward the needs of historic
brick and stone. Slaked
lime and local sand
destroy a structure
if overly strong. Analysis
requires interpretation. Repointing
restores physical and visual
integrity, or detracts
and damages the masonry:

Mortar as bedding
rather than glue,
pigmented by lampblack,
brickdust, oystershells,
coral sands and locks of hair.
The joint is tooled
when thumbprint hard
to match existing bonds.
New construction bloom
fades through normal
weathering.

River-rounded sand,
free from impurities,
a handful is part void
between the grains. Good mortar
fills each emptiness. And vines
weigh down one corner
of the building, vines
planted by another.
I say they'll drag
the whole wall down. You
swear they hold it up.

Self-Taught

there's a radial arm saw in our family my father
gave my brother headed north looking for land
with his lover and child I remember my great-
grandfather Charlie balancing a pool cue on the
two-and-a-half fingers making his left hand how
winter came and he didn't have shoes for school
and a teacher gave him her old pair a kindness too
big too pretty too essential to be squandered you
can't get back the things you needed when you
had them the man who raised my father took the
safety off to best cut teak candlesticks that burned
the first time I tried candlelight a good case for
precious metals better hand-me-downs what hap-
pened to his missing fingers I know without ask-
ing—in our family you pick them up yourself