

SESTINA

poem by Amanda Quaid



Image: "All of Us" by Lou Storey. "Sestina" was written by Amanda Quaid for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic Challenge, April 2023, and selected as the Artist's Choice.

We buried him behind the church
before the carnies came to town.
Now at night, you can hear the laughter
all the way to Lover's Lane and past my house.
I miss the quiet, if I ever really had it.
They tell me it's the sound of progress.

My Daddy once measured my progress
on a worn-down wall inside the church.
He used a pencil to mark it,
confirming that I was the shortest kid in town.
Then he drove us back to our house—
the way was longer then—and laughter

banded back and forth between us, laughter
like there had been progress
toward something like friendship, our house
a little more like a home than a church
that day. At that time in our town,
men kept to themselves, and that's all there was to it.

I've heard there's a village, though I've never seen it,
where boys run naked by the sea, and laughter
tumbles forth from the carnelian huts in town.
On warm June days, I wonder if progress
will take me there, where church
can be found not in a building or house

but in bodies, in eyes and in beauties that house
secrets, and some days I want that so much that it
hurts. Could bodies be church,
I wonder, could voices, could laughter
be church, and is it a yielding to progress
to forfeit this town

and find, I suppose, a different town,
a brightly-colored candy apple house
where I could feel the call of progress
move in me and with it
joy and life and song and laughter
in this body I could come to call my church?

But a town, in spite of progress, has a gate, and it
becomes a little higher every year. At night, the laughter
reaches all the way to my house past the church.