**Proposing on the Brooklyn Bridge: Poems About MarriageProposing on the Brooklyn Bridge:Poems About Marriage**

Ginny Lowe Connors
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According to the National Center for Health Statistics, forty-three percent of all new U.S. marriages end in divorce. In this uncertain climate, contemporary American poetry about married life inhabits a terrain of the soul that ranges from magnificent to parched with loneliness. This anthology inquires into the precarious expedition of marriage, charting its hopes and risks.

Readers will find words in this volume that stir a potent gasp of recognition. The institution of marriage may exist in profound flux, yet these poems convey with deep knowing into the essential, sacred mysteries at the heart of human partnership.

The editor, who is also a poet, has previously published two collections on relationships, Essential Love and To Love One Another. Several of her poems appear here with the work of American poets including Wendell Berry, Kelly Cherry, Donald Hall, Stephen Dunn, Jane Hirshfield, Stanley Kunitz, Lisel Mueller, Sharon Olds, and Richard Wilbur.

Through the poems, divided into segments such as “Beginnings,” “Together,” “Apart,” and “Looking Back,” married life emerges in all its complexity. In Gilbert Allen’s “Falling in Love,” for example, a couple joined in sky-diving nuptials becomes a symbol for the vertigo-inspiring leap of faith taken in marriage: “You had to assume / that they crashed safely into the ground, folded their silks / up like Brobdingnagian lingerie / and walked glove in glove into / that future that we all share … while far above / a man of God videotaped / their departure, trying to convince himself / everybody should try this once.” The question hangs in the air behind them: is the undertaking of marriage brave or reckless-or both?

Deeper into the collection, marriage appears as an intimate refuge from a perplexing world. Partnership is the place where one can be truly seen and known, as in Connors’ poem, “The Things We Carry”: “We carry our strangeness with us / wherever we go, but in this marriage / I want to say / I love what is strange about you, that garment your soul wears.” How stinging the chill is, then, when spouses become strangers in their once familiar space, as

Stephen Dunn describes in “Diminuendo,” a piece on ending: “They leaned back / in their chairs / at the café / neither fully present / nor gone, his mind cut loose / from his heart / like a dinghy in cold water.”

Because this anthology encompasses a universal subject in vivid, accessible and intensely-felt work, it will likely appeal to a wider readership than the usual audience for poetry. Here, poets serve vital nourishment: a generous portion of both the awe and bewilderment that comprise love.

*Melanie Drane*