



CONFIRMED

Sometimes, in the clinic downtown, a woman will
enter with a child
and see what poor really looks like: people with
no teeth, shoes with missing tongues,
dirt, desperation for something which shows itself as
a tremor,
and she will turn around and run back out with
the child.

Some days I stand with them, some days I go home
through the back door
so I don't have to see the sheer numbers of
them.

Last Thursday Thomas brought a knife to the clinic,
showed it to the student therapist, who panicked.
Thomas does that. Creates a scene sometimes. I've
known him for years,
his broken shoulder, his black tooth. He wears,
around his neck,
the bullet he shot his father with.
Some people at the clinic
admire him for that childhood act against torment,
some fear him. Bringing a weapon might mean
we never help him again.

I am outside in the snow with Thomas.
I am freezing.
He wears a black baseball hat to cover his eyes. He
says: I was only going to slit
my own throat—I would never hurt someone
else.
I watched the wet tremble of his lips. A piece of his
despair fell from him,
it had a shard of glass in it.
I saw him grow a wing.



I saw him fill with honey.
This witnessing might not be enough but
it is something.

—Mary Jane Nealon

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Jane Nealon, RN, MFA has worked as a nurse and writer for thirty-six years. She has two collections of poetry: *Rogue Apostle* and *Immaculate Fuel* (Four Way Books). She has received fellowships from the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, and Breadloaf Writer's Conference. Her memoir, *Beautiful Unbroken: One Nurse's Life* (Graywolf, 2011) won the Bakeless Nonfiction Prize.