

The Luck of the Poet

I was once in a jail cell
with a fellow named
Manny

he looked like a real bum
but he kept saying
“I don’t belong here!
I have a college education!”

I did not have a college education
I barely made it out of high school
but there I was in a cell
next to Manny
a college graduate

I was lucky
because I did not need school
to teach me
what I needed to know
to squirm through
life

“What did you do?” I asked.
“Nothing! I don’t belong here!”

we were both awaiting trial

“Pray to your gods
you get off with a slap
on the wrist.” I told him
“They’ll eat you alive in prison,
they’ll break your teeth out
and make you suck their dick.”

he went to the other corner of the cell
we were like chickens inside a chicken coop
waiting to be sprung

I was lucky
because while Manny
paced

I wrote poetry
on the jailhouse
walls

“I’d rather die.”
he finally said.

then I thought of
the luck again

for
no matter
what happened to me
in here
or out there

I would be
able to turn it into words
made of bone

immaculate
stanzas
that will turn
the ugliness
into something
beautiful

like a sad
lily stuck
in the mud

and
in the end
a dick is a dick
a poem is a poem
and I’m still
alive