

# MAX

by Susan Vogel Taylor

---

By the small fountain, belted in his chair,  
he frets over the hopping, scurrying things,  
whose names he once knew.  
Nearby on a bench, a familiar stranger  
clacks white plastic sticks together  
while sounds come from her face, annoyingly,  
since she seems to desire a response.

He delves into his treasure pouch,  
a cloth bag by his chair,  
surprised again that the writing sticks are gone,  
but thankfully, still there is the coffee-stained  
book of an old poet.  
Max caresses the frayed, upside down pages,  
remembering his heart's expansion, if not why.  
He touches the words, little curlicues in rows,  
and talking to the book, with his uh, uh, uhs,  
he drops it, and watches helplessly  
as the letters run away in the grass.

---

This poem originally appeared on *Two Lilies* (Grapevine, TX: Seadog Studios, 2017), CD-ROM.

Max reaches down furtively, oh, oh, oh,  
and sees two feet away, an arrogant grackle, shiny black.  
The yellow-eyed bird opens its beak,  
and produces a harsh scream, so long, so sharp,  
that the air pushes away until only  
a shimmering void is left. The call goes on forever  
as the old man sees around the bird an aureole,  
glistening, like shards of glass.  
Now there are rings of light wherever he looks,  
and the warm shadows turn to mist.  
as feels himself slipping from his body,  
snatched away like a straw.  
Now he is a small boy again, in a down jacket  
and thick leggings, with his arms and legs outstretched,  
floating high in chill air, spinning, balloon boy,  
while far, far, below in the whiteness,  
he hears the knitting needle lady call out the name  
that sounds like it might be familiar.

Perhaps.