

Urban Bird Life

Iris Lee

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IN THE SICILY-ROME AMERICAN CEMETERY NOVEMBER 2001

Eight thousand headstones,
“arranged in gentle arcs,” (quote, courtesy
American Battle Monuments Commission)—
a year’s worth of killing.
Two flags slap softly in the wind,
flat-topped Roman pines stand guard,
a last polyantha rose carries its burden of fragrance,
and all the butterflies are white.

Further North, in ancient hill towns of Tuscany,
people believed they were forever protected by height.
Now we view the TV footage of the death
of a vertical city of steel and glass,
the ashes of fire chiefs, brokers, busboys, girls in boots,
and learn that history ceaselessly teaches us otherwise.

GREEN SURVIVOR

Gingko flings archaic branches
asymmetrically
against the sky. Cousin to the giant fern,
survivor of dynasties,
it once nurtured dinosaurs
bent on devouring its fan-shaped leaves.
Through Earth's ages,
Gingko has survived
as swamps turned into forests
and spores into seeds.

It lives now in my city
and I bow
to its green longevity,
willing it to survive its current foes—
street-faced children
with their bikes and knives,
Asian women
grabbing for its smelly harvest—
willing it to keep waving those branches
wackily
while rooted solidly
in the tender shell of the turtle
that carries the weight of the world
on its back.