

# Poetry Porch: Poetry

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## Questions for a Bench on a Hill

By Barbara Siegel Carlson

*Fagagna, Italy*

Were you here during the earthquake of '76?

I still hold the tremors.  
The dogs that keep barking,  
the man who keeps mowing his grass,  
the stranger who rests here.

The village bell tolls for those  
who do not hear it anymore  
and those who remember when Earth bellowed out  
and felt it in their stomach as the dark snow  
loosed and the rock poured down.

What do you see now?

Whoever rises from my seat has a faint  
view of those who lived in the valleys  
whose spirits come to the bell tower  
and pathways as the evening  
turns the color of plum.

What if you are not from here?

Let her look at the jagged blue range in the distance—  
and know they crumble. And the cypresses  
that come to a vertical point,  
and the mulberry trunks that hold inscrutable  
faces in their crevices and knots.

Somewhere the deaf girl wakes  
beside her freshly-picked pink  
flowers strewn across her pillow  
and hears a nightjar trill.

My legs, my back, my empty seat hold traces  
of what follows the cries and echoes  
between the bell chimes, where you too  
might linger and hear  
the sound of a fiddle, though the strings  
broke. Or notice  
the persimmons all lighted  
with fruit. Or press a hawthorn berry  
between your fingers. The juice is light  
as the eyes of the old couple who often sit here  
while blackbirds circle the castle remains.