Home and the Homeless

By Elizabeth Woody

The buildings are worn.
The trees are strong and ancient.
They bend against the grid of electric lines.
The windows are broken
by the homeless and the cold past.
I am home on the yard
that spreads mint, pales the Victorian roses,
takes into it the ravaged lilac tree.
The black bulk of plastic lies about
stopping unwanted weeds for the Landlord.
Tattered, the cedar tree is chipped to dry heaps of recklessness.
The unwanted spreads by the power of neglect.
The wear of traffic says that we are out of time,
must hurry.

Age, the creak in the handmade screen door fades behind itself.


Source: Luminaries of the Humble (University of Arizona Press, 1994)

An enrolled member of the Confederate Tribes of Warm Springs in Oregon, Elizabeth Woody was born in Ganado, Arizona. She studied at the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and earned a BA in the humanities from Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, and a Masters in Public Administration from the Hatfield School of Government at Portland State University. Woody’s poetry reflects her close ties with her family, the natural world, and her people, a group she portrays with humanity and sympathy. Woody works as a program coordinator for the National Science Foundation’s Center for Coastal Margin Observation and Prediction. She is a founding member of the Northwest Native American Writers Association and a board member of Soapstone, a writing retreat for women. Woody is a program officer at Meyer Memorial Trust in Portland, Oregon. In 2017 she was named the 8th Poet Laureate of the state of Oregon.