



# No Starling: Poems (Pacific Northwest Poetry Series)

*Nance Van Winckel*

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The new century peeled me bone bare like a song  
inside a warbler - that bird, people,  
who knows not to go where the sky's  
stopped.

Over the years, Nance Van Winckel's extraordinarily precise and energetic voice has built upon its strengths. Unpredictable, wry, always provocative, displaying a sure and startling command of images and ideas, her poems make every gesture of language count. In *No Starling*, Van Winckel accomplishes what has proven to be so difficult for poets across time: a deeply satisfying balance of the spiritual and political. Although richly peopled with figures from this and parallel worlds - Simone Weil, Verlaine, Nabokov, Eurydice, "the new boys" working in the morgue, and others - *No Starling* moves beyond a reliance on the dramatic resonance of individual characters. Its vision is deeper, its focus both singular and communal: the self on its journey through the world ("Mouth, mouth: my light / and my exit. Let nothing / block the route"), and our responsibilities as a people for the precarious state of that world.

Slate

My too-sharp lefts kept making the bundle in back  
sluice right. I was driving with the dead Nance  
in the truck bed. The gas gauge didn't work  
so there was an added worry of running  
out of juice. Her word. Her word one  
windy evening with the carpets  
stripped from a floor, which  
surprised us as stone - slate  
from the quarry we were  
headed to now, but Let's first have us  
some juice, she'd said, then, barefoot on bare slate.  
The truck-bedded Nance, wrapped in her winding sheet,  
thuds left, clunks right. I'm sorry about my driving,

sorry about the million lovely pine moths mottled  
on my windshield. Thank God, here's the quarry,  
and there's the high ledge, where, as a girl long  
ago, she'd stepped bravely from the white  
towel and stared down. Then she'd held her nose  
and leapt out into it - this same cool and radiant air.

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