

## Substance Abuse Trial

He mispronounces you,  
the judge, rhyming your first  
with your second name,  
making you into something  
ridiculous: Gillis Willis Mead.

But you stand as still  
as they taught you in the army  
when you were a young man trying hard  
to keep secret what you knew  
about how to kill with germs.  
As quietly as we used to stand  
on the front porch together at dusk  
listening for the first cricket of the evening.

Now you stand accused  
of wanting to die, of saying so  
endlessly, with needles—and the speechless  
track marks recording it all.

The evidence is  
a red river, mounting.  
It wants to carry you  
away like an old chair  
some fisherman forgot  
to take home. And I want  
to shout: listen

—this man  
is my father.  
I love him.

Is there a place  
where all those things  
that catch in the throat  
gather and shape themselves  
into something as soft  
as the G in Giles  
was meant to be pronounced?

Is *that* where you thought  
you were going?

— JANE MEAD



POEM REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION. © 1996 JANE MEAD.  
PAINTING BY JORM SANGSORN / ISTOCK.COM.

*Editor's Note:* I heard this poem on a podcast called *Poetry Unbound*. The poem originally appeared in Jane Mead's book *The Lord and the General Din of the World*, published by Sarabande Books in 1996. I was deeply moved by the way the narrator describes her experience of watching her father confront his mistakes in a courtroom. It is a reminder, perhaps, that everyone who enters a courtroom brings a history, a perspective, a *humanity*. Poetry finds the remarkable in the everyday. It at once expresses a unique viewpoint and is subject to many interpretations. This poem made me wonder: What would her father's poem say? Or the judge's?

On this back page of *Judicature* we try to highlight different perspectives on judging and justice. If you read a poem, see an artwork, or maybe hear a speech or song that reflects a unique view of the work of a judge or the justice system, we would love to hear from you ([judicature@law.duke.edu](mailto:judicature@law.duke.edu)) and perhaps reprint the work in a future edition. And to hear a discussion of this poem (and many others), visit *Poetry Unbound* at <https://onbeing.org/series/poetry-unbound/>. — Melinda Myers Vaughn