

2021 ENOCH PRATT FREE LIBRARY POETRY CONTEST

A contest for Maryland poets. Winning poem will be published in **Little Patuxent Review** and celebrated at a public reading hosted by the **Enoch Pratt Free Library**.

Hollies

Steven

Last Name

First Name

“Body/language”

Title of Poem

Internal Use

Received ☒

In Review ☒

Approved ☒

READY FOR DISTRIBUTION ☒

we entered new
relationships with
physicality itself. not
because we must
never touch,
but because
we must touch
and cannot.
we became fluent in
the living body,
beautifully speechless,
words themselves
memorials to
a reality past.
still, we wanted the old sleep.
in every tired, cadaverous second,
we risked
our bodies among
patients
breathless for love,
—that simple imperative—
and so we gave them
the choreography of
our only gift:
care
in the form of
ghosts, so shrouded we
ached,
squeezing prayers
to drip,
to stain masks
miraculous

protocols for our
patients and colleagues and
ourselves:
restrain breath,
rely on instrumentation.
darkness is inward vision
outward
and as soon as we learned this,
the language of
the dying body,
cacophonous
in sudden failure, and merely
a dream ending,
we wanted to wake up new.
anything to pause trauma.
in every proximal moment
one unceasing nightmare:
the terminal ranks, those
straining most to stay alive,
crying airlessly for human intimacy
which we denied them.
the machines repeating
our heartbreak and
our ultimatum.
with no cure,
a body that
could barely be seen. they
looked to us,
past mortal lashes
leaking
in the shape of
need