

(POETRY SELECTED BY KATE FOLEY)

Patina

i.m. June Southworth

See these steps,
surviving the latest upgrade to the house,
worn hollow in the middle, and yet
people still trudge up them with the shopping,
bump wheelie cases after them, coax children.

Do they feel what once was:
the absence that contains a century's detritus,
the warmth of many soles before them,
residents and visitors retained
in their dusty emptiness?

And those benches
in the parks and cemeteries,
with their brass plates celebrating donors, lovers, friends;
do the builders taking tea breaks,
the office workers, lonely pigeon-feeders,
do they read those names and conjure up
the dead?

Just as history might research the treads of feet
that ever climbed the stairs,
and science track their DNA and every trace,
so those people in our lives who touched us,
never really leave,
even if they drop off Christmas lists,
even when our own hard disks are wiped,
our memories apparently unreachable,
even rogue prions and decay of identity itself

can never quite erase
the patina of our connectedness.

Kathryn Southworth