To the long line of women who have written books of “confessional” poetry, we can add Ellen Steinbaum, whose most recent book is Brightness Falls. Steinbaum’s poetry is gentle and sympathetic to our senses, certainly as revealing as her predecessors who write about their lives and loves.

There are four sections to this book, the first, “Begin Again” starts with untethered and is followed by begin again, two fifteen line poems in which we learn she is alone with, in the first a “solace/of pillows” and in the second “with beach grass blade/for compass.”

In the first scenario we can see her alone in her bed, the empty pillow next to her where he late husband would have been, something everyone experiences with the loss of a partner. In the second poem there is another recollection with which we can associate, our confusion at suddenly being alone and like wind blowing through grass and the grass perhaps bending in so many directions, we find ourselves directionless, unsure of where we want to go or should, not metaphorically, but actually.

In one of her longer poems Steinbaum reveals what life was like for her before she met her new husband, though we do not learn how much time has passed after the death of her first husband before the new relationship.

Before I Met Him

I was fine
gave dinner parties
grew a garden
read the papers
paid my bills
repainted rooms and bought new dishes
went to ballets
wrote my will
had a new book out
visited family
tried new recipes
tried new wines
made new friends and wrote new poems
had (small) adventures
I was fine
I was fine
had (small) adventures
wrote new poems
made new friends and
tried new wines
tried new recipes
visited family
had a new book out
wrote my will
went to ballets
bought new dishes
repainted rooms and
paid my bills
grew a garden
gave dinner parties
I was fine
I was fine

Males and females can associate with the emotions of having a depart-
ed spouse and the need to move on in life. Perhaps everyone’s method is
different, but the underlying attempts to restart and reshape are all there.

Unlike some who might search for romance and a new beginning,
there are those who do not consciously make the effort.

widow’s walk

she didn’t want to
want again
yearn for arms
around her
arms holding her
new kisses
skin warmed
by new hands

she didn’t want to dance
drop dizzily
from brightness
to deep shadow
want to go instead
on her even way

stay small and
folded from the light
never venture
into crowded streets

she never wanted
she never
dreamed

This poem reflects both the prelude to hope and the movement to the
next phase of a life, from to companionship to love confirmed by the first
stanza of:
there will be worse (I)

after the argument
he says there will
be worse and I
think those
are words of love

There are times when readers wonder if Steinbaum is writing about her deceased husband or her new mate. There are times when readers are left with no doubt it is about the present and the future, and while brightness may fall, a new sun rises for her.

This book is a “must read” for everyone who has survived and recovered from loss. It is for everyone else as well.