

# 1<sup>st</sup> Place Winner – Tennessee Williams Poetry Contest 2021

## *My Life on the Line Between Death and Desire* by Shelley Herman Gillon

I was born in a delta town  
Where I devoured books and sat on a star  
To read my life  
In its carbon permutations  
And bought miracles at the five and dime.

I was torn by the roots from the sunlit alluvial soil  
Of the south and replanted in a tenement in the Midwest  
Where I escaped suffocation by spinning stories.

In my twenties my soul found its home in a honky-tonk town  
On a crescent mound  
In the crook of the arm of a big river  
Where the streets were named for muses and saints  
And where houses of ill repute  
Were dressed in wrought iron lace.

I grew rich from my writing  
Doing business in cement towers, grand theaters  
And studios out west where my plays were slaughtered  
And then sewn back together on celluloid.

I made peace for a time  
In the arms of a lover  
Who nestled us a resting place  
On the last key island where gulf meets ocean,  
A little house sliding off the edge  
Of the continent.

I liked to think that I was a schooner sailing on the waves of a poem  
Released into the glass container of the sea.

Though I choked to death  
I once believed I would die  
From my own splendor.