When I Was a Boy

Glassy blue crystals formed   dissolved   in water.

But that isn't all—
single, lonely

                              seventeen

I lay on a sheet of paper

a ball its outside circle
long out of sight.

Because you remember
I was responsible for eleven.

I needn't be lonely any more
if I persuade the other atoms
to stay together
not satisfy a guilty conscience
by giving up
at least by giving away

(they split apart
go away   by itself)

You can see   that each—

some even more lonely
had a great deal
left behind.

At the other end
this stream is a current.

"When I Was a Boy" was created from *Letters of a Radio-Engineer to His Son* by John Mills (1922). About the poem and the process of composing it, Susan Kay Anderson writes:

> I looked at John Mills' letters and chose interesting words and phrases. It seems like he wanted to disclose more than radio information to his son. As I read, I picked out words and phrases which spoke to me and wrote those down in an attempt to understand just what John Mills wanted to say. I'm not sure it is in this, but I could feel an explanation about war that has no explanation. As I read *Letters of a Radio-Engineer to His Son*, I could see how Mills leaves his project of wanting to speak to his son and just focuses on the science of radio technology. It was interesting to me how Mills seems to be entertaining himself, too, in these letters, and I looked for those words and phrases that illustrate this.

Susan Kay Anderson is the author of *Mezzanine* (Finishing Line Press 2019) and *Please Plant This Book Coast to Coast* (Finishing Line Press 2021). Her work has also appeared in the anthology *Insurrection* (Gnashing Teeth Publishing 2021), *The Ocean State Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Interim*, and elsewhere. She is a poetry submissions reader for *Quarterly West* and *Lily Poetry Review*. She lives in Sutherlin, Oregon, and can be found online at www.pw.org/directory/writers/susan_kay_anderson.