

Wilderness House Literary Review 15/3

John Grey
INDIAN SUMMER

The sun of Indian summer
moves slowly across boundaries
that seasons have created to divide us,
crimson spotlights blazing through
the mists of imaginary borders,
the filter of trees,
redrawing the map of tribes and species,
gilding the pond, the grass-tips,
rescuing park benches
from emptiness's chill.

Now twilight sparkles
the half-molted forest,
oaks and elms
that can't believe their luck.

Even the moon
rises vast and orange,
as if it holds the warm day
for safekeeping.

No longer the last refuge
of November light,
it glows with all the small prayers
that put it there.

IN A WORLD THAT ONLY INVOLVES DUCKS

Lake ice is breaking up
and the ducks find room
for webbed feet to breathe.
A male pintail's wheezy "prip prip"
is answered by a female's quack.
A canvasback flutters white feathers
behind a proud brown head.
A wood duck flashes its red eye
as it dabbles in the thawing waters.

Most ducks form swimming flocks.
But a few pair off, slip away
like covert lovers
into the privacy of the shoreline reeds.
New life beckons.
Old life hears.

TO THE MAN WATCHING THE HAWK

You've reckoned on that spiraling upward flight.
Do you practice it yourself, in the mind,
just like the way you learned to read?
Are you encouraged that,
even though you're no bird,
you can contemplate the ascent,
ken the promise of the sky and sun?
You've had never more spirit than now.
Nor inspiration. Nor consciousness.
Above, a hawk's speckled breast.
Below, the tilt of your head,
the sensory surveillance of the eye.
Keep looking up.
A thin cloud, a clifftop,
a proud head, wings wide and gliding –
pull, one by one, the threads of freedom.
You will not interrupt the texture.

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FALCON

Floating on feathered sails,
eyes crowded with vision,
the falcon spies a faraway field-mouse,
skittering through spears of grass.

The kill is quick and intoxicating,
as hunger, undisguised and naked,
pounces, gathers, devours,
then soars to the nearest treetop

to celebrate the taste of its own breath.
Then all is echoes, shudders, whispers,
the stuff of wind and tree branches,
funeral rites in ultra-violet light.