

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/3

Joshua Dolezal

Indirection

The braid of a waterfall weaves
down a canyon wall
hundreds of yards across a gorge

The water stiffens the longer I look,
until the cascade is like paint
dried against the bank

As I notice tossing fir boughs along the rim
of the ravine, I sense the stream winding into itself
once more, the way

the blind can feel motion with one lobe of the brain,
though they know nothing of shapes
or their names

Wind-water vision, fill up my edges
with straight indirection—the patience
to turn my gaze

The Helicopter Pilot

He is banking hard against the blur of a slope,
firefighters scanning the treetops for smoke
two ridgelines south of my trail crew. We are hacking
our way through last year's burn, where the cedar
were gutted by fire and forced to fold inward, the slabs
now barricading the trail. In the distance, the pilot
pulls the chopper level, inching back against the hillside.
The skids waver as he hovers, the tail of the ship drifting
like a waterborne leaf, his wrist the only center up there
truing the axis of the blades.

Perhaps today he remembers
the fire on the Kootenai, when the incident commander
ordered bucket drops on a blaze at the base of a gorge,
the canyon's mouth so choked with smoke
he had to imagine the lay of the land, easing his rig
above the powerlines he knew stretched across the divide.
After he'd released four buckets, the air cleared enough
for him to see the wires tossing in the rotor wash
as he passed below. Now, so many years after that close shave,
I wonder if he fears the drifting tail of the ship, if he imagines
an irrecoverable spin, some unseen gust
fouling the hair-trigger controls.

Tomorrow we will return
to the station for a few days' rest, then the next hitch,
the one after that—finally, the season's end
and the vast space between working and knowing
what else we must do, nudging the controls
as we wait. For now I am pulling one end of a saw
through a charred cedar slab, my vision blurred with sweat,
body rocking with the rhythm of the blade. Soon a crack
will tell me to change my grip and quicken the pace.
When the piece splinters away, I will heave it over the bank
and join the rest of my crew to watch the copter
swaying in midair—as if the pilot knows what holds him up,
what hunch guides his hand.