

Wilderness House Literary Review 7/3

Joel Long
Along the Upper Yellowstone

For Harvey Larson

Late season, the air is cold at dusk,
and water moves like a cold animal
shining in constant birth. The meadow
breathes gold into itself as the frost
comes and the geese go, silent among
the gleaning. The voice of the water
pours into night, and we cannot see
but know it continues when we depart,
when we sleep, glimmering things
in the gauzed moon autumn. We know
there is something inside that flows
through land, that land responds to,
bearing its weight and silver speed,
its wetness, resin cold growing colder
toward the weight of ice some winter
still to come. Tonight, it is just autumn
dissolving the river, tumbling leaves
in current like they are golden acrobats
who let their wills leave them for eddies,
for the drip, the sparkle shooting through
white veils of water. The grasses gasp
astonished to feel water at the still base,
stalks, tight weave binding the cut bank.
If I can know water goes on, I learn
what I've come here to learn. I look
on the body and know water my sister,
water my voice turning beneath the ice.

Aspens Live Underground

for Roxanne

Small thing to notice, these leaves
move against another, the field
no one is but you. Each leave has
its motion, rubbing against the other,
sound, flicker in this wind at dusk.
Its small concord comes together,
slight crescendo, so slow even light
does not notice. Where is the stone
we study our lives to know beneath
the shimmer, aspen leaves, white bark
with its eyes, wing of the darker bird
against white powder? I will lie down
with you in the wood, look up as water
through leaves, live to hear the story
again and once that the leaves design,
this shuffling of body on body, mouth
on mouth, this rising where no one is
we say is quiet, recognize as our home.

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Carp Song

After Oleh Lysheha

Before it is too late, remember the carp
in the bottom of the river hanging
like river weeds, lethargic and huge.

I won't say they are fluid as water,
won't, they are big stones, algae slick.
It is not winter. There is no memory

of ice for water. They do not imagine
rigidity, but the carp stay down anyway;
they stay down in silky mud, the net

of their bodies catching the dim
light that weathers water to spark their scales.
They do not hear magpies squawking above.

They do not see the owl spreading twilight
with its vacant wings as it crosses the river,
the swollen carp anchored in earth below,

weighed by water. Before it is too late,
acknowledge the beauty of the dumb
speck of being, troll fish, shimmering toward

darkness, closer to silence than you are.

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Disembark

for Roxanne

Boat sorrow, I lift you.
I hold you in sky. I move—
you move with me towards
a bend of trees with falling light,
a harbor of gold broken leaves.
Boat coals, burning, boat thorns,
you will not sink. Some things float
by miracle. Some float by will
of water that bears them up as I do,
that holds them to a bank of stems,
bangles of fireweed, lamps
that rattle light above the shore, pull
ash to dry shimmer, cataracts
hung on reeds. Lanterns burn
the solemn rust, swing their way
to water, the morning, a scarf
of apricot, sewn through night trees,
where I will find you, floating
in the nectar of better, sweeter,
combed by black willows and time.

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Varney Pasture

I want to tell you how quiet the grass is.
I want you to listen to grass as though,
the grass is speaking your own voice, as
though that row of Russian olives silvering
the gradual hilltop steeps scent to the place
your memory begins. This hillside lifts
the entire sky. I want you to believe this.
I want you to let the sky above these hills
fill you to the blue limit, push night away.
Let the darkness linger underneath. Let stars
flame out there where insomniacs worry
stones by the creek-side moonlit, shuffle leaves
for lost gems, for rusted keys for the house
they no longer own. I want to be time
or its costumed pawn to of wooden smoke,
wires barbed with sharp braids, this pasture
heated spring and soft perfume. I can
only be *in* time. I can only point to the hill
and say, *not far, it is not so far*, and we will
look back and say how small the cows look
in the fields we came from, how long ago
you peeled your shoe to see your scar.
From here, the moment seems like grass.
Perhaps it is only grass made clear distance,
made grackles peppering cottonwoods below
made the water sound that may well be wind.