

Wilderness House Literary Review 9/3

Taylor Graham
Synchronic Swans

Can we find her? My dog beside me;
ziplock bag with a piece of paper from Maria's
trash – scrap of junk-mail, maybe,
or a poem. She walked away from here.
So many givens in our lives, and then
these puzzles – fragments of story, riddles,
chance. How many directions the wind blows
on a first Saturday in May.

I clip my dog in harness, open the bag;
piece of paper impressed with words, *swan?*
or *swarm?* *sworn?* Just letters,
maybe half a line.
My dog snuffles sprung grasses
as they clutch at fragrances of passing. Across
meadow she pulls me out of breath, full-
tilt past a pond – two birds
float far offshore. Swans, I think –
swans, here? More likely geese.
The mystic silhouette – Swan. The word
surfacing at a glance of letters in a zip-
lock bag.
Slip-shot synapse
on the wing. Another 30 seconds,
my dog is wagging at the backside of a tree
where sits Maria. *Swans?* I ask. Yes, swans.

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Unpaid

Wind in the canopies of trees at trailhead,
duet with dog-song of a wander-day,
ordinary summer Monday. I've got my map
and daypack, Woodsy-Owl litterbags,
we're wilderness-patrolling
up through lodgepole, timberline, mules-ears
and mariposa lily; granite and lava,
whole histories of uplift and erosion underfoot;
route of creaking wagons; the same vista
some scout tipped his hat to, a couple
hundred years ago.

Did he feel trail-tipsy too,
this oxygen-thin high of the Sierra?
Over the saddle and down to a lake;
pick up hikers' litter – rusty can, skillet without
a handle, it all goes on my shoulders
or in my dog's saddlebags.

She'll swim in the lake like snowmelt's
going out of style. I'll pull off
boots and socks,
let my feet flow free.

We'll hike back under The Sentinels,
eminent old men of avalanche and thunder,
vengeance of time against stone.

Who wins? We do. We're on the trail
this summer workday. Call it
holiday, a holy day.

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Hours

Under lava bluffs, a meadow
so delicate with flowers, a photo
might be mistaken
for a Persian rug. My photos faded
but there's memory of
a whiff of carrot – Queen Anne's lace
among the blooms untaken.
Who would pluck
a lupine from such a show?
Paintbrush in seven shades of lemon
rainbowed through the reds
to purple – this earthly heaven
is the pot of gold.
And then I'd load my dog
in the car at end of day, our time-
sheet filled as if this were
a job and for my pay
colors shifting in the rearview,
eastwind scraping granite
to silvertone, and creviced ravens-
rock taking on the age-
burned luster of a burl madrone.