

I Dream of Stairs

A footworn valley through the middle of the stone
treads ever upward from the banks
tourists sprawling in her flanks

Styrofoam discards tumble gracelessly down
while centuries of pilgrims mount

ancient paths spiraling
ever upwards
muddy footholds dug into riverbanks
stones artlessly arranged
logs pulled
or hewn then nailed into place.

We walk, adjusting our eyes to
the shifting horizon where
we aim to arrive

eventually

the stairs rise with each breath
ancient desires carried
ever upwards
shineworn rocks and roots
give way to concrete
or brick or marble impermanence.

From silence to echoes,
our feet continue
their journey does not end
if or where or when

We reach
a point we no longer recognize
though the grooves center us
ever upwards
from the turbulence below.

Ephemera

A scattering of birds fell from the sky
as leaves knocked from a tree
by a sudden gust of wind.

Once elation felt like this:
mauve petals dispersed
from the plum tree
across the street;

a silent grey fox
running alongside
on a moonlit street;

the redtailed hawk above,
watching the world pass by;

the bobcat ahead
bounding up the dirt path;

her child at three on two wheels
wobbling away, never looking back.

Today she feels this loss:
words
gathering as storm
clouds whisked through the sky

by a relentless wind
driven by malice
or spite

blown off course
scattered beyond the heavens
outside of time and place.

The Taxidermist, Betrothed

Chart wisely your course
through skin and flesh;

the marks may fade
with time. Follow

her linea nigra
betokening misery

lived or yet to live;
your choice.

Your hand must be still
your heart as well;

draw the blade firmly
without a breath

to delay.
The separation must be quick:

disarticulation is an art
of timing and grace.

The sleight of hand
reanimates

a death wish for life
until parted

ways of being or
seeing the specimen.

The Goldfinch

Goldenrod in black caught me midstride
Tucked into your asphalt nest, you sleep
protected from the crush of tires, perhaps
but not the fangs of winter or dogs.

Like Darwin, I too want to trace your path
through the golden filigree now matted
with dirt but not blood. No vestigial
clues to explain why you sleep in the road.

Beauty intact, you summon Dutch Masters
to embalm you for eternal viewing;
instinct and luck of the draw framed in
gravel, this precious and useless beauty.

Ancient cracks
mar the surface,
once elastic,
desiccated
rubber rounds
the collection.

Decades beyond
the fractured band
holds tightly
curled memories;
your words flow
as water

eddies around
stones in its
beautiful and
irrefutable
logic. Wanting
to chisel through

the bricks we chose
carefully, if
not wisely, to
contain a wife,
a child, a life
and the moments

between: daily
gestures of love
and compassion,
incandescent
sparks of ire,
and boredom too.

A dare, a risk
to slip between
frayed edges,
faded ink;
dry stones litter
the riverbed.

The sun burns a
hole through the
day's wasteland;
a quick
inhalation
before the plunge.