

Hike to Pyramid Peak

The mountain juts up, not bothering to explain itself
or invite us in.

But above the tree line, the granite clasps your foot with each step
like a friend shaking your hand, eyes twinkling.

And though the air catches, thinner than we like,
we breathe in pine, clean wisps, each breath.

So many to the top.

There's pine in your bottle of scooped-up snow.

We eat peanuts and toss the shells,
agree it's unfair to the squirrels

who'll be pained to know we've left them empty.

The wind howls so on the peak my hair comes undone,
blowing all about in a panic.

This is all supposed to happen. We are supposed to remember this
before our knees,

before these trees exude their last piney breath
via beetles or fire or our indifference,

before the snow all melts.

Long before these sharp edges nature abhors
are whittled down, weathered, worn as our bodies

as we think back to when we could
climb Pyramid Peak.

On my Son

For you, who have years to decide,
each second is weighty, each minute slow.
You, luminous, don't have the words,
but perceive a tree by each leaf,
fields by each blade of grass.

From the earth you emerged,
a clear, quiet trickle first,
then spilling out
where ferns and twigs
tangle with you, rivulet,
on your way, some
yielding to your native force, some
nudging your path just so.
You glisten, leave wet traces as you pass.

You may pool for a time,
reflecting your small world,
and I may sit and enjoy your stillness.
You may, just the same,
rush down ravines never mapped,
mingle with rain, leave us to wonder.

Now, sounds rattle your tiny ears,
this world too loud and cumbersome, built for giants.
Each action, reaction foreclosing another, you move blithely,
not bothered by this constant end of the possible,
by knowing you may only flow downhill.

We, muddled rivers, plod through valleys
deep in our watersheds,
collecting and discarding particles,
minutely changing our banks,
Carving out our meandering route to the sea.

Microscope

The smooth fabric I examined as a child
with a cheap pocket microscope grew wilder,
otherworldly. Craggs and jagged edges
hidden from casual observers,
so obvious with my new wisdom.
A single thread, an impossible tangle.
I bet no one in this room knows what
things really look like, I smiled to myself.

All smooth again the next day,
and smooth again years later, after forgetting.
Constantly, I learn again
and then forget again, to really look.

Red Maple in Capitol Park
(for Geoff, upon his retirement)

We'll remember you as
that red maple, full
in a fall blaze. you
must know that tree—

rooted but reaching,
open-air but framed
by our window, it sighs,
shakes down a few leaves.

time for budding, birth,
the mad summer, is quietly
gone. it glows scarlet,
flush in the slanting sun.

it's been a good year.
the energy absorbed;
a new season, new leaves
scatter further, still will.

Night/Day in California

Who would find poetry in this—
windows boarded,
doors unhinged?

Diapers, rolling papers, chips.
Eyes stalk scraps in the streetlight—
each address its own dark heart.
The dogshit cursed today
is cursed again tomorrow.

Though a photographer might frame
a photo here, black and white, haunting,
"Powerful,"
the novelist would say, the story must have
an arc;
there is comedy, sure, but too dark to lighten
a calamitous spiral.

Knowing this, the muse,
with a long sigh
lingers lazy by the coast
where fog hugs hills like a snuggling lover
where oranges dribble sweet juice
where sky paints the sea blue
and the air,
the air like crystal
Marivel polished
while we slept, transcendent.