

Nest

Wrap me in your wings,
hide me high in a white pine,
weave me a nest with your beak,
line it with downy feathers,
sew it with fine thread of nettle,
twine it with silk of milkweed,
cushion it with pussy willows,
braid it with milk of moonlight,
let me feel warm breath from your beak,
let me feel your heart beat against my breast.

Rock Point, Ontario

Lake Erie's waves polish limestone fossils,
Devonian sea tides once lapped this shore,
where children ponder trilobites and wander
the bed of the salt sea from which they came.

Gulls sweep low over Rock Point Beach.
Lighted freighters float across the moon while
night beacons flicker on a distant shore—
the lake howls with gulls and freighters' horns.

At bedtime children in sleeping bags
curl up on the warm limestone bed,
cuddle up to the lullaby of lapping waves,
sleep all night in fossil seashells,
coiled in a bed of time.

Arctic Refuge

All day the sun circles the horizon never setting, orange at midnight, white at noon as we float downriver to the Beaufort Sea— at first rapid current slams our rafts against stones, but soon we float calmly— the distant Shublik peaks cast shadows far across the tundra, a snowy owl circles white as we drift north in twilight.

In the hills fireweed and paintbrush bloom, the owl swoops and lands on the high tundra, fossil coral and seashells lie everywhere, the remnants of tropical oceans— beneath arctic stone dinosaurs sleep in crude petroleum—maybe enough to fuel the world for another six months; refined into jet fuel, pterosaurs would fly again, leaving tails in the sky above the Arctic Refuge.

Next day we float north past a bluff where two stone heads—Inuksuk cairns—keep watch as they have for a thousand years over the Inupiat and their river. In the distance Arctic sea ice cracks like thunder, on the horizon ice and sky meet in a mirage; tundra swans trumpet as we float north past dunes to the sea. All night the orange sun sits low while a snowy owl waits in silence. Let the pterosaurs and allosaurs sleep another fifty million years.

Hurricane Irene

All day water pounded on the roof,
poured down in sheets while white pines
whipped in the hurricane. Houses shook
and windows rattled, air pressure dropped
as low as it had in fifty years, but barometers
could never measure this storm.

Tiny streams gorged themselves on the deluge,
became monsters who lifted huge boulders from beds
where they'd lain since the last glacier, the flood
heaved stones, uprooted trees and hurled the mass
downstream into houses, water gushed through
windows, shingles, boards and beams buckled,
cracked and splintered then rolled down into rivers
risen far over their banks—no longer minor tributaries.

All over Vermont from Waterbury to Bethel
from Rochester to Marlboro the water rolled,
streetlights flickered then went out. A crushed
car floated by, its interior lights still on, coffins fled
an eroded cemetery followed by a swimming corpse,
its stiff arms flailing. Two huskies howled and howled
as their dog pen filled but nobody could hear them
over roaring water and pounding stones.

For twelve hours it rained and rivers rose
even more quickly; people ran for high ground
before they could be washed away— no escape,
only pounding rain as railroads twisted like licorice
and roads turned to gorges. A covered bridge
splintered against boulders and the very water
which quenches and cleanses rolled its timbers
downstream with even more stones and trees.

The next day it was warm and clear—
at first light strangely silent, already at dawn
an odor of decay as water settled,
brown and still, blue jays called.

Finally, as clouds lifted, the mountains
could be seen, slopes still green, sirens wailed
while crows hovered, waiting, diesel engines roared,
but it would take months to ill and fix what Irene had done.
Slowly the flood receded and stones settled,
floodwater seeped out of houses and left oily muck
on every plate and chair; those who could
returned home, saw what water had done and wept.

Cardinal on a Cable

A cardinal sings from his perch on the cable,
happy for another Florida dawn;
his call is the same as cardinals everywhere—
but what if he were plucked from his wire
and instantly landed in New Hampshire
where it's zero minus fifteen today?

What the fuck, he'd say, now what?
His cable perch carries news
of war in Syria and northern cold,
but he calls cardinals with his own news.

Why are some spared war and cold, others not?
Robert Frost knew ...*that for destruction ice*
Is also great. I too would perish tossed
nude into New Hampshire this morning—
at least the cardinal has feathers.

But we're here in Florida,
on our screened porch having coffee,
grapefruit and cereal, while you, red cardinal,
sing to us from the television cable.

George Longenecker