

## Northern Idyll and Other Poems

### **Northern Idyll**

Flushed and fevered, appalled by the city,  
you crept through nightfall over shards of glass  
back to the Northern forest, whence you'd come;

An upland preserve of bear wallow and fattening deer  
where tannic alder and maple-soaked rivers cool  
like a tonic the color of tea or bourbon,  
depending on your need.

You had planned to wade their timeless eddies,  
to meander in their cloudy back currents,  
to imagine lost loves and idylls  
and absent friends,

until the night I arrived at your door,  
with furrowed brow and frown as tight  
as my clenched and trembling fist  
to solve the latter once and for all,

and to bring word from the late city  
with its campaign slogans and broken bottles,  
scorched pavement and red-rimmed,  
downcast eyes,

word of the woman and child denied  
this leafy province of despair.

## Northern Idyll and Other Poems

### **The Leap**

I hold your small hand in mine  
while salmon lunge  
and hurt themselves  
on the rocks beneath us,  
chasing death,  
immortality  
and a dim and watery notion  
of home.

In the not-too-distant past,  
folks from the east side of town  
arrived in horse carts and carriages  
on this bluff above the river,  
hailing one another  
in the cool of evening  
as they gaped at the bounding rapids  
and the bears  
who fished below.

With a promise of ice cream in hand,  
we make our way to the car  
parked on the bluff –  
now a park  
surrounded by hospitals,  
apartments  
and schools.

One day you will return without me  
and you will understand  
like the generations of salmon and men,  
that though the bears and horse carts  
may be gone,  
the poorly understood migrations  
and countless wet dreams  
remain.

## Northern Idyll and Other Poems

### **The Gallery**

My wife was born in a tropical climate  
where trees flourish through sun and rain  
and the four seasons are a myth passed down  
and diluted like generations of *conquistador* blood.

Here, in Michigan, she is fascinated by the falling leaves,  
how some nights they swirl and dance across the road  
seeming to perform for our oncoming headlights,  
and she chides me for failing to notice such beauty.

Thanks to her insistence, I now have another experience  
to reconsider, another image to call to mind  
in the cold and austere days that will come  
soon enough, in the long, white gallery of winter.

## Northern Idyll and Other Poems

### **A Rain**

A sudden chilling autumn rain  
blows through darkening fields and towns,  
drums on moss and weakens stones,  
moistens eyes and dampens skin;

shrouds the bleak and withered hedge,  
snaps the slender wavering branch,  
floods a narrow wooden bridge,  
and gathers battened skiffs to launch;

takes no heed of wall or fence  
nor burnished plaque to mark the deed,  
seeks the least resistant path,  
deaf to human remonstrance  
and blind to monuments of their dead.

## Northern Idyll and Other Poems

### **The Archives**

After the stabbing light of the sun  
has dimmed to a wintery ache in the eye,  
one grows accustomed to stark interiors,  
intimate with corridors  
and their convolutions  
of gun-metal gray.

After a certain period of adjustment  
amid the superficial scrape and glint  
of marble halls and their distorted  
echoes of coughing like laughter  
in the rarefied air,

after the clatter of metal slamming  
and footsteps marching away in lockstep,  
then fading along the corridor,

something rare that we are gifted  
and burdened to name  
is bred in the silence that follows  
and filed away.

There is a veneer of winter solitude  
that can linger then, briefly,  
like snowfall melting on clothing

or that can remain for a longer term  
like wintering in some forest hollow,  
marking a more remote frontier,  
a knife's claim on ragged bone  
bounded by a feverish wind.

Perhaps that is the end of it, after all,  
a sudden shiver, an abrupt decision  
followed by the tinkling of ice  
and a return to the sunny port  
of conviviality.

Or perhaps, after numerous seasons,  
after window-less years spent  
locked in dutiful chambers  
by turns airless or drafty,  
idly tracing the torn and faded map  
of one's veins,

Northern Idyll and Other Poems

from some half-remembered story  
rescued from the false bottom  
of memory  
one hears apocryphal footsteps  
creeping away  
along the chilly corridor  
among the snowy drifts –

(new stanza)

a second self  
cloaked in the terrible  
gift or burden  
of a second skin.

One imagines archival landscapes,  
even the frozen scar of a frown  
so like a familiar horizon.