

A Lover's Quarrel

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There are some to whom a place means nothing,
for whom the lazy zeroes
a goshawk carves across the sky
are nothing,
for whom a home is something one can buy.
I have long wanted to say,
just once before I die,
I am home.

When I remember the sound of my true country,
I hear winds
high up in the evergreens, the soft snore
of surf, far off, on a wintry day,
the half-garbled song of finches
darting off through alder
on a summer day.

Lust does not
fatigue the soul, I say. This wind,
these ever-
green trees, this little bird of the spirit—
this is the shape, the place of my desire. I'm free
as a fish or a stone.

—

Don't tell me
about the seasons in the East, don't talk to me
about eternal California summer.
It's enough to have
a few days naked
among three hundred kinds of rain.

In its little plastic pot on the high sill,
the African violet
grows away from the place
the sun last was, its fuzzy leaves
leaning out in little curtsies.

It, too, has had enough
of the sun. I love the sound of a storm

without thunder, the way winds
slow, trees darken, heavy clouds
rumbling so softly
you must close your eyes to listen:

then the *blotch, blotch*
of big drops
plunketing through the leaves.

—

It is difficult,
this being a stranger on earth.
Why, I've seen pilgrims come
and tear away at blackberry vines
with everything that's in them, I've seen them
heap their anger
up against a tree
and curse these swollen skies.

What's this? —a mountain beaver
no bigger than a newborn mouse
curled in my palm,
an osprey curling over tide pools and lifting
toward the trees, a wind at dusk
hollow in the hollows of the eaves,
a wind over waves
cooling sand crabs washed up along the beach.

Each thing, closely seen,
appears more strange
than before: the shape of my desire
is huge, vague,
full of many things
commingling—

dying bees among the dying flowers;
winter rain and the smoke it brings.

If it fills me with longing,
it is only because
we are like the rain, falling,
falling through our own most secret being,

through a world of not-knowing.

—

At the end of the day,
I come, finally,
to myself, I return to the strange sounds of a man
who wants to speak
with stones, with the hard crust of earth.
But nothing listens.

When the sea hammers the sea wall,
I'm dumb.
When the nighthawks bleat at dusk, I'm drunk
on the sadness of their songs.
When the moon is so close
you can almost reach it through the trees,
I'm frozen, I'm blind,
or I'm gone.

Fish, bird, stone, there's something
I can't know, but know the same:
I hear the rain inside me
only to look up
into a bitter sun.

What do we listen to, what do we think
we hear? The sound
of sea walls crumbling,
a little bird with hunger in its song:
You should have known! You should have known!

—

Like any Nootka rose,
I know there are some
for whom a place is nothing. Like the wild rose,
like the tide and the day,
we come, go, or stay
according to a whim.

It is enough, perhaps,
to say, *We live here.*

And let it go at that.

This wind lets go
of everything it touches.
I long to hold the wind.

I'd kiss a fish
and love a stone
and marry this winter rain

if I could persuade this battered earth
to let me make it home.