

from "The Waterfall"

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Note: Sections 8–12 of "The Waterfall" are the last sections of a long poem with the following epigram from Ezra Pound's *Cantos*: "To have gathered from the air a live tradition." The poem is an attempt to give voice to the living and the dead here in Montana often expressed in the soundings of water. The first seven sections were published in *Bellingham Review*, Fall 2005.

8.

The giveaway dance

May your nephew from Fort Peck be healed from the leukemia
 May your sister find her courage and drop her crack head
 boyfriend

May Sam get a kidney he goes three times a week for dialysis
 May your grandson who has started to have seizures from the
 Ritalin

May the young man who was stabbed—a good ranch-hand they
 say

May my aunt with diabetes give up her Carlo Rossi
 May my uncle survive his heart attack he is only thirty-seven
 May the nurses have pity on him and treat him well
 And if he does go—because we don't want to challenge the
 illness—

May his spirit find his people and not linger
 Here where it is harsh may the slum lord fix the plumbing

Here what the young ones have left for the cities
 May those three old men the healers who now stand for the
 people—

 see how they struggle to stand up—

Here is a jar of wild chokecherry jam

Here is a pouch of Old Red Man Lucky Strike

Here is a dollar bill for each of your fifteen grandchildren
 see how they dance with empty hands

Here is the fish tank the rest of the bannack

 toilet paper army jacket a Pendleton blanket

Here in the old days grandpa gave away the car and the
 furniture

 and finally he gave away the house

Here in the trailer house on the reservation

Here where the ragged last of the tribe come with ribbons

Here where the medicine man hangs them in the bundle
 and sets the bundle swinging with a stick

Now since the black spades of aspen have hit the ground

Now because the drum beat has not changed and has not
 stopped

We hold the gifts behind our backs and the snow field darkens

May the wind scour the treeless plastic caught in fences

May the man who walks the blizzard not be an apparition

May twenty below on the highline may the loud crunch of tires

May your mother at the cemetery her white cross made of
 plywood

May the lit cigarette help us to go back

There where the berry soup the rendered lard and raw kidney

There where the tripe apples cookies and white bread

There where the coffee on early and the water for tea
 May those watching us may the old men not forget to name
 them
 May the tree people the rock people the kingfisher the eagle
 May the dead who are just one threshold between us may their
 fugitive voices

find us

9.

A Madonna sits in a painting in the Castelvechio in Verona,
 a tapestry deep with scarlet and gold hung behind her.
 It is meant to be a garden, but without Renaissance
 perspective, the blue-winged angels seem to eat from her hands.
 Joggers cross the Medieval bridges over the Adige.
 Six o'clock traffic stalled by the Roman arena, now the opera.
Time is everywhere / unmoving / in the evenings of the world.

I wake at four a.m. in an ancient room in the Hotel Scalzi,
 one with twenty foot ceilings and bare walls. There is a window
 over the alley which I kept open even as I slept. Students
 drinking wine below. Time is a cloud above me, dissolving into
 faces, voices, sinking and rising the duomos, palazzos,
 and under them, as part of the apse, the stonework of paleo-
 Christian basilicas, and under that, the temples and the baths.

There's nothing interesting on this path, the Indian boy says
 back in Montana. The dogwood buds are turning red,
 leaf of strawberry. The land is soft again, after rain, as we step

on moss and lichen. But where is his ancestry in this?
 The loggers have painted blue streaks on the trees to be saved.
 There is honey, what the boy calls the tree's sap.
 He has never learned the language his great-grandfather
 speaks—

What if a bear came, he jokes. What if great-grandma did?
 If there are thresholds on this earth beyond our ability
 to apprehend them, *the quality of the affection in the end*
that has carved a trace, the marble threshold of the cathedral
 worn halfway down by the pious, this footpath, the evening
 sweat rocks, the name for bear—evening, we like to call it,
 an evening of the glare of day, a force somehow opposite to
 gravity.

10.

No water falling.
 No water to cross over the damp sand
 between rocks.
 Moss on the rocks still green yet.
 After that, the jam scorched.
 Guests came with lice in their thick braids.
 The motorcycle was stolen from the backyard.
 A young rodeo rider
 who got drunk at the bar,
 forgot his horse
 was still tied to his trailer.
 Seventy miles an hour down the freeway
 that night.

After that, the fires began in earnest.
 We hear that firefighters stumble
 into abandoned mines
 that have since become the refuge of snakes.
 Yellow. Dark. The winds pick up.
 Can any of us run fast enough?
 Squirrels, rabbits, the small ones die.
 A black bear leaves paw prints on the front door.
 Large toad on the road which we run over.
 By now the woods are closed to us.
 We have packed and left twice,
 each time taking different things with us.
 We hear the deer
 as we try to sleep in the heat, their small cries,
 the scuff of their hooves.
 If we leave the door open: webs, dust, hair,
 the dead bodies of grasshoppers and flies.
 We used to be full of the beauty of the world,
 to be full like that the accomplishment.
 Now, the smoke and heat deafen us.
 No water falling.
 No stars on the gray limbs of willow, alder.

II.

Instead, green bleeding down into the industrial parks, strewn
 with the remnants of teenage luck: used condoms,
 contraband beer, with the useless prohibitive next to the
 cement plant. There is a water line drawn on the land. We
 often cross it, run into it, a sluice through the salt ditch
 and blue yarrow.

The miners swarm like ants, dirty, hungry, having left their
 homes and families in the east. It is not food or shelter
 they are after—you've heard they feed dead cattle and
 poultry bedding to their cows—but the commodities, the
 art and furniture, the peccadilloes: lava lamps, infinity
 pools, pink flamingos.

There is a certain emptiness between the ancient years of
 roaming and the end of roaming, the old song and dance
 gone, the gods waiting for their complements. How huge
 this country is and how we've filled it. The woman in the
 desert subdivision leads workshops in correct listening,
 although it would be a different place here, blue dragonfly,
 dry species, without the Roman columns, without the
 irrigation.

Whether or not we are part of this, should we still feed their
 angels, we who love our quick summers of breath? Fog by
 the wayside, freckled and blue. If we forget the new series,
 the undercoat of lupine, and have to piece it anew day by
 day? If profit isn't involved, should we be interested?

