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Two Poems

G. E. Murray

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WHEN THE HILLS BECAME WEST VIRGINIA

When the wind first walked off
And whistled south,
Grass was hearsay;
Sun, the sudden rumor
Of season told in tongues
The sky interpreted
As a lasting impediment,
A totem of speech.

When night stood in the ground
Like a relic,
A secret keepsake
From the horizon's tomb,
A story was born
Of reeds and pinesmell,
Vast spans of carnivorous green.

From one early winter to next,
A fortune in light
Wound through these hills
Like a fresh scar.
Tablets of air
Went unread.
Silence improved
Its raw reserves.

Around ice and sacred backwaters,
Among the long talks
Of trees, lectures
From rockfall, furious
Landslide omen,
Signals of other life rose
In smoke, in a hush,
Somewhere beyond this
Spilling thickness.

Birds here married
Mid-air, wings in tilt,
Under the blessing
Hands of sunshine.
Beneath oak's splitting
Bark and crook,
A braid of insects
Wormed in honor
Of nothing so beautiful,
Nothing absolute . . .

And a deer's head, dead asleep,
Educated earth
To its infinite dreaming,
Guiding small eyes upward
In terrible delight.

Then all the stones unturned
Imagined themselves
Set in graves of mortar,
Saw nameless animals
Freeze in sight
Of new tracks.
And all stones
Spoke righteously
Of infection,
An abscess of space,
The distance narrowing
Between stone's
Word and unheard voices . . .

And in that tense congestion,
When scents of fear
Finally lifted
In witness of cliffs,
When trails below
Burned up through evergreen
Like fuses,
The hearsay grass was crushed
Into wagon ruts, wind

Tested gingham,
Woke to the screech
Of sawmills,
Gave homespun promise
To those equipping
The dark with log fires,
Work songs, the rules
These hills would always ignore.

CAITLIN'S POEM

for my daughter

Lifting now to voices,
shifting shapes, tendrils
of air, you join

an essay of people.
You join, and renew again,
old women from Dingle,

Kerry, washboard America—
your provincial mothers
wrapped like skirts,

bundled under earth,
each fertilizing a time.
Some begged for drink,

laughter, for a kindness,
all reciting poetics
of kitchen, street, church.

They direct you somehow,
their ancient ways sweeping
through new blood—

your soft, sweet edges,
your first body
wrinkled like a peach stone.

There is this haystack
of eyes, daughter,
the menace of affection

told in visits,
gravy kisses, gifts

of silver and wood block.

Kate, beware and rejoice
in the same breath,
but don't hold it too long.

Wear us like a raincoat,
my love, then shed us
in a flush of sunlight.

We'll call it love,
call it order, our hearts.
Consider mechanics,

law, a life in medicine,
the everlasting fix
of your mother's fine face.

Baby, woman—it snows.
We are ignorant
of snow, its perfect

lurking promise. No matter.
We're snow beings,
ice dolls, figures of mind,

ripe for sunstroke.
Far off, wild as lightning
and marshgrass,

you will own all your own
blind possibilities.
No brooding ever helps

sell fatherly strategies—
save little things,
like you, or a blessing

of weeds, wind that tunes
us like pianos,
a legacy of blood's wine

and vinegar. It's this,
babe: a haul of high waters,
with or without oars.