

Christian Woodard

excerpt from a five-part collection

II

Mine the Current

Island in the Sky

A storm like this sung us to the circle —
remember how the mountains drew close? Purple
sky, dust swerve, cottonwood roar. The belt we
nailed new notches for, whose hunger cinched us
tighter. Every fold and silence hard veins
under tourniquet. Cones scrape each other
and the hollow stone. All your mouths open
to the memory of water — leaping
hot and bloody from a shadow like mine.
Even dry pebbles had a taste like tears.
If we ran, the hallways of your legs lit
silver through the grasses. Nighthawks
carol to the drapes of rain, hung so
lengthy and just now wetting your cheeks.

Three Dreams

Though the creek had dropped by May, the low lot,
between young trees and the loud channel,
stood flooded, still, with overtopping melt.
I went down through that cut-over woods
where saplings start from the scarred &
cankered boles, breached by suckers. Up, went
their smooth thanks — *yes!* — they gestured.

In the swamp, a swivel-head waspnest spoke owl
with me & the dish-faced stumps I walked on agreed:

*Root down here and hope to be nothing
but sweetly devoured. No careless grace
will shout above lain-out, foul giants.
Sink through the silent bark & leaves —
black tissues in the water.*

Stream, through the mirrored pools you downcut
clear on sand & gravel. Rag-barked roots beside
us, coppice laced above. Slipper my feet
with a rounded hand. Rub shadows, those tarnished
coins, on my knuckles. Burrow deeper, shallow.

And still I haven't learned the language of moss.
Around my dumb ankles, silver fish lance
upstream, mining the current for vacancy.
So long as I wait, they dart new, narrow
angles & instantly the paths erase.
The sky outside this green arch stands
for another cutting. Sumped oil leaks through
white roots. Footpads, listen for a possible
direction: upstream, negative, hardened lines.

Chelone

When the big man said:
Pick up your house and walk,
I had been so naked
that my ribs strained to clothe me.

When he peened my backbone
a firmament, how I longed for internity.
Thank him a blessing, I said,
safe from extinction.

But how far can you walk, always at home
before you pray, like me, for unhousing?
To be halved, earth shell and oracle of sky.
Your firesplit bones, too, can spell the avenue.

Will you say to him, like I do:
You lover, rescuer, who seals lips
and shares breath 'til we dizzy,
Single-eyed with closeness,
You smell the sea prickle from my pores.

The woman pilloried there — flay her
lidless sight to the city; unclothe her at last.
Rain on her buckets of rain, until she's a patch
of queen anne's lace and chicory.

They at least could nurse at her substance.
If he ever splits you, my dear, you'll know his note,
the one that hummed through my teeth.
What cursive will your intestine spill?

Then ask, as I do:
From charred fractures remember me.
When I misplace my
heart, mark time with
this now, and this here, and this is.

Though I would disown it,
feed me again my offal like
shelled eggs, like round
pebbles into an oilskin.

Stack them before my spine.
My shell is empty as from a fast,
as from the wilderness.
There's room for you here.