Elk Dreams
(June 2013)
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1.

If the time should come when I can fly with Elk,
I’ll spring for first-class seats
And a round of drinks for all our fellow travellers.
A great feast will be prepared
For those who remain earthbound.

II.

Their weekend almost over,
The four hiked down through snow
That turned to red with mud.
First was the Golden, polite,
Then the black mutt, too small for a Lab,
Followed by the two tall ones,
Each of their packs bristling full
With fallen weaponry,
Retrieved from where the oaks thin out.

Finding is a challenge, true,
But witnessing the divestiture...
The wire fence slowly rusts in the flooded field.  
The willows come along and take up the water;  
And hide the rusty fence.  
Follow the fenceline down, down,  
Down to the thicket.  
See if anyone’s at home.  
Ask if you can take some thinnings.  
If no one’s home, leave a gift.  
Take the thick ones and bend them into Cs.  
Then take the thin, red ones and cut them into even lengths.  
Make a lodge from the Cs.  
Make a broom from the switches.  
Sweep the floor clean.  
Make a small fire in the lodge  
And dream willow dreams.
IV.

One night, not long ago,
The three of them were waiting out back.
They knew he was ready.
He thought he was unprepared.

He met them back there, behind the house.
It was cold ~ but, sleepy, he didn’t notice.
They spoke to him in tongues he didn’t know.
But his heart understood enough to know
That these were prayers, and a weight was lifted.

But that unweighted heart of his
Now feels ungrounded,
Floating as the sleeping dreamer wakes.
The Traps are Set

The beta wolf that leaves his pack
to pursue new prey
should not expect an easy run.

Traps are set.

The lone wolf becomes defensive.
His path ahead darkens.

Tenacity and ingratiation:
Are they the logical choices?
Or will heightened senses save his day?

So far, the traps have only pulled some fur
from the tip of his tail.
Easter Dinner

The little lamb was well bled
Taken before its rightful time
The fields of grass were parched brown
No rain on the horizon

Unlucky enough to be born
In the first dry year in years
So the shepherd made the call
Brought this one south
In white blocks, closely wrapped

Resting through a long, long winter
Suspended inanimation
Now, with the greening
And robin’s song before the dawn
The process of transformation
Will be completed
Lives of the Saints

Official hagiography omits doctrinal inconvenience.
Why did Earth Mother give Brigid the power to lead the priests?
Where did Sava meet the Wolf Spirits and how did he earn their trust?
And what of his contemporary, the one known as Francis,
Who grasped the secret of riches by giving all away,
To whom the loving birds flocked?
What if the Church had truly heeded their callings?

Driving through the Blue River Hills

So this is where
All the blue tears go
Down through the cedar groves
Down to the reservoir
It’s almost sunrise and coming up
Out of the moistened draw
I think of Coyote
And then he runs before me
All out
Right across the road
The Artist (for Carl)

His day begins early.
He walks the land at sunrise
And knows the light so well there.
The awakening is underway.
He sees the unsoftening,
The drying of new butterfly wings,
And becomes part of it.
Walking on, he catches a warbler, at rest,
Surrounded by down
And waits for the moment when fireflies
Begin to rise from the hay meadow.
He paints their moving lights
Across the darkening sky
And lets the warbler fly free.
Three or are there more?

Silent sentinels emerge slowly (uncertainly) from within the snowstorm as you unknowingly approach and lift your head, if only to brush off your hood.

Transfer of Energy

Just before sunset
The oak logs decided
To send a tribute
A thousand small suns
And a willing breeze
Sent them
In the right direction
Not Far from Home

The box elder branches
that once were silvery purple
now show strange shades
of yellow green.

Two black-headed robins
spar intently
on the uncut lawn
beneath the tree.

Way up high,
the redbird
proclaims his kingdom,
emphatic.

But the little tan bat
pays no heed
and flutters easily
through its budding branches.
Three Meditations on Sassafras

I.
When their floral buds were swelling
The Great Elk took a bite
On an open ridge just east of Cave Spring

II.
Three colors at once
The first week of October
All on the same branch

III.
It was their special secret
Till the Frenchmen finally figured it out.
Start with a repeated theme, hushed,
at irregular intervals.
Suddenly, kick it up a notch,
And play it like you mean it, with a strong beat,
Like the lead trumpeter in the funeral march.
When Yellow Elk Meets Red Wolf

When Yellow Elk meets Red Wolf,
no fur will fly;
no growls will be heard;
no standoff will occur.

They will each be alone.
There will be no fear.
There will be no hunger.

Their pride will merge, and they will walk
in perfect silence down to the lake
and drink of the cool water.
Reflections on Adolescence from a Mercian Hymn

"The princes of Mercia were badger and raven. Thrall to their freedom, I dug and hoarded. Orchards fruited above clefts. I drank from honeycombs of chill sandstone."

Geoffrey Hill, from "The Mercian Hymns" (1971)

As a boy, I never met the Princes
(those encounters would come much later)
nor knew of Mercia,
but watched the gentry pass
and was enthralled by Duke Kestrel
when he caught the Mouse
under the painter’s messy feeders.

The budding orchards, then, were somewhere
out towards Wauconda.

When I found the sandstone bluffs,
I did not want to leave them.
And what could be more precious
than sweet honey sucked from its comb?
They Emerged from the Lightning

The shades were drawn as tightly as could be
But then the light refused to be excluded
Bolts cut through the shades
It was quite a show

The program began with Tom on stage
Was he the director or the emcee? Who knows?

The bugling really got my attention
Six great stags came forward
Shades notwithstanding

In two rows they came forward fast
Each pulling three long logs
And sounding their great power
It was quite a show

When it was done
Two mute medals of Tom remained on the dresser
And thoughts of great power
To Seekers

There are some days when we're sustained
Solely by the seeking,
When, with those of kindred spirit,
We venture out together
Seeking that shared sense of possible.

When winds gust past, and each thinks
The vision
May tear apart and fly away,
But holds to it,
Applying both mind and heart,
In good spirit,
To grasp the flying twig, the shaking reed,
And catch in mid-air, over and over,
The vision...

Then, at the end,
After the red sun sets
And a bright silver moon
Is revealed in the western sky,
The winds calm,
And we find ourselves sustained.
Watched Over

An owl waited long on the pole top till we came.
Afterwards, the magic chant was sung three times,
Echoing briefly out of the dark ravine.

Back to High Meadow

When Grandfather takes a sip of this pale green concoction,
It takes him to the sweet meadows of his wilderness.
He stops for a moment to kneel
And takes a stem to chew on his patient trek
To taste all the fruits of paradise.
The Algorithm (for Eve)

The computer was told to staff the store
But measured their lives like merchandise,
Its algorithm efficient and heartless.

Her life is filled with unmeasured steps
Through unmeasured snows,
Her sleep interrupted unmeasured times,
And her quiet exhaustion drifts away
In unmeasured frustration.
Her unmeasured prayers
To leave the computer behind go unheard.

And that algorithm becomes more efficient
But no less heartless in its measuring.
At the Pond’s Edge

Mother’s lavender patch died out last winter:
What a shame.

But at least its essence can still be sensed above,
in her washing place, Lavandula,
the pond patrolled by silent swans.

There three roses once did grace its edge.
The two of hundred petals thrive,
whilst the one of fewer petals and darker hue
no longer breaks bud.

But at least Redouté caught her in her prime,
and a red petal floats still in its scented water.
Pipe Dream

A pool of her blood lies there
Down in the ancient quarry.

On one hot day, after all the staff has gone,
Find your way down to the pool
And be covered in her dust.

When you get home that night,
Brush off her dust with care,
Pink and gray, onto a white plate.

Put it in a small glass jar and save it
To season the stew you cook
For all your relations.
Dear Abby

Dear Abby,

I am most grateful for your prompt and thoughtful reply to my letter. Your answer gives me much to ponder. But I hope you can help clarify a couple small points.

What is the true nature of “sacrifice” in this day and age? And how do I conduct the offering? Should I invite all my friends over or just the Owl on a moonless night?

What makes the most sense and won’t ruffle too many feathers?

With deep respect, I remain,

Yours truly,
Still Puzzled in Iowa
Two Runners

The last time we met you had been running
And my mind was running along with the wild ones unexpectedly freed
Running temporarily

But we came together on the hotel elevator
And we shared a few heartfelt words
I was not ready for more

But you should know that my mind has been running
Alongside yours for years
All the way back to the strawberry years
When I first heard your voice and met your eyes
Through these times changes fly
And we both have been unexpectedly freed
Running temporarily
(As is the nature of all life)

But perhaps we will come together again on some elevator
And go running on some higher plane
In the Right Place

When by four times
such dreams are dreamed and shared,
if, my friend, you are in the right place,
someone will recall the old stories;
another will see a new rising sun;
and the dreamer will dance an old dance anew.