

RICHARD BANK

Along the Perkioman

Sent to a halfway house and waiting for parole
after six and a half on your seven and a half to fifteen,
furloughed for the day to look for work or apply for DPA.

With a social worker's wallet for juice you stole
a bike, went west. Drunk in a bar in Ohio
trouble overtook you and troopers brought you in.

We visit at Graterford on the cold brown banks
of the Perkioman. Lilies of the Valley have erupted
white and green, the roar of the freshet has begun.

They have offered five to fifteen for the whole thing,
you are forty two. We talk about back time, front time,
turning over for re-parole, two pros weighing the options.

Could you do better pleading open, no deal; let the future
hold what it may the way that you have always done it.
I say no, cut your losses. You want to let it play out.

We look at each other, two old guys: my wrinkled suit,
Your old fashioned hair and faded bodysuit tattoos;
ordinary men with lost dreams, watching the same stars.

The Old Scoutmaster Dreams

The old man walks out into the forest.
Red oak stand sentinel at the overlook,
a secret patch of wild arbutus grows nearby.
He goes to see if his fire ring has endured.

Further on, past a spring and open to the sky
was the meadow where his troop had camped.
In his memory tents shine in the ancient moonlight.
Seated on a low branch, he inspects the trail,

takes the pulse of the living wilderness,
examines the talking tracks: deer, raccoon,
the delicate fox; runs his fingers through the
cropped vegetation for the herbivore's signature.

The old man returns to the asphalt.
Cars bob in the radiating heat.
That night he dreams that he has left the world.
He dives into a lake, trees undulate in a howling wind.

Settling his hip into the mattress, the old man
curls around and sleeps. The night slips under the sash
and through his fingers like sand.

The Death of Ryan Spiess

*Getting and spending we lay waste our powers,
little we see in nature that is ours—*

— Wordsworth

He keeps the belief
that there is recovery from this.
He waits to be whole again,
for time to excise the loss
like a splinter to be expelled.

Our morning walk spills over
with remembrance, confusion.
“People will not speak of him,” he says.
“For me, when I say his name,
he is still alive.” For me too.

Ryan and my own son, exuding life,
bounding up the Appalachian trail
and out of sight. Old guys behind;
plodding, happy, exhausted mules.
For me too. For me too.

We tramp through neat suburban streets,
which should be safe from even this
as the morning sun appears—before
the suits and briefcases, the getting
and spending—and jump the cemetery wall.

The detritus of sorrow awaits us.
Pennants, ball gloves, favorite toys,
placed like magic on the dumb mounds
in this still living corner
of the elegant, peaceful dead.

Brown and withered leaves
cling to the watching winter oaks,
rattle summers’ memory
in the wild and bitter wind;
recorded on the tablet of the heart.

