

Elk River Falls

is where the Elk River falls
from a rocky and considerable height,
turning pale with trepidation at the lip
(it seemed from where I stood below)
before it is unbuckled from itself
and plummets, shredded, through the air
into the shadows of a frigid pool,
so calm around the edges, a place
for water to recover from the shock
of falling apart and coming back together
before it picks up its song again,
goes sliding around the massive rocks
and past some islands overgrown with weeds
then flattens out and slips around a bend
and continues on its winding course,
according to this camper's guide,
then joins the Clearwater at its northern fork,
which must in time find the sea
where this and every other stream
mistakes the monster for itself,
sings its name one final time
then feels the sudden sting of salt.

Earth

The sun is so clear and torch-like
on this cool October morning,
all I am aware of is the sensation
of its steady heat on my upturned face.

I am not thinking of how late the train is
that I am here to meet,
here with nothing to read, not even
the morning paper or a story by O. Henry.

The unfiltered burn of the autumn sun
on my skin is all that I know,
that and a small bubble of curiosity
about whether you could re-create this feeling in hell

if you managed to position yourself
just the right distance from the roaring
bank of furnaces where the sounds
of shoveling and howling are coming from.

But no, the damned would always be jostling
and pushing us closer to some fiery maw,
and in heaven the light would be
too hallowed, too theatrical to warm our faces.

And there would be no place for the train station
or the little café across the street,
no place in hell for the sunny table,
the bitter coffee, and the woman walking her dog.

Only the glare—I am imagining
with my eyes closed behind my favorite sunglasses—
the glare, some low chanting,
and the milling of some vast, incorporeal gang.