

In Thanks of Rainfall

The rain has hammered hard this year –
I'm sure you've seen the green in those hills.

Climb them.

Travel quiet as tigers, and twice as quickly,
And you might glimpse:
waterfalls feeding waterfalls; an infinite regress.
You say these hills have an end.
that the falls must have an end too.

So, leave it all here:

your water,
your hiking poles,
your mother and father,
your so-stubborn sense of solemnity.

You can pick it up on the way down.

Walk alongside terraced pools feeding pools,
rowdy and roiling
in remembrance of the sky-borne salvos they came from.

Rafael Burger

Lemon Tree

You asked me, yesterday,
if I remembered that lemon tree we saw.
I told you yes. But now I wonder,
why did you ask?

You didn't find it curious?

There weren't any leaves on the damn thing.

But the lemons, oh my, the lemons,
each as grand and watchful as that giant Buddha in Leshan.

Hanging heavy on the bare boughs.
That tree seemed to pour everything it had into those lemons,
and it held them tight,
even though the season for harvest had come and gone.

Like you?

Rafael Burger

Ash

Days like yesterday –
which was golden all the way through,
But seemed especially so before dusk,
and during which you couldn't help but stare at the mountain,
because it hadn't been so clear in so long,
and when you turned, you saw that your friend had the same idea,
and the breeze which flitted through the treetops was cool but not cold –
Are insufficient.

Remember that nor'easter that blew in overnight
like bombers in formation – silent and somber until just overhead?
Remember snowplows scrambling day and night,
frantic as buckets in a leaky boat?
Since that storm, soughing disgusts me –
wind should break the branches.

Look to drought-stricken timber, drier than bone –
to the blaze which licks and leaps, hungrier than the gale can carry it.
See the joyous thrill in the spires it shoots –
fireworks without the insult of black powder,
eating their source thin without a thought for what comes next –
and love me, like flame loves the forest.

Rafael Burger

Six-Gill Sharks

Six-gill sharks know nothing but blackness and weight,
heavy weight, pushing in on their hides.

Fish like those leave wakes of deoxygenated water which diffuse
just slowly enough to become a problem.

Fish like those will drown if they cease their meander
through the arid expanse.

Fish like those do not tire or weep as weeks turn to months
alone in darkness.

The survival instinct of six-gill sharks is infallible.

Six-gill sharks recite a mantra that joins uncountable,
unknowable, unknown, days and nights into one breath:

There is no halting.

Human mantras are not so stark – they are chopped up
by inhales and exhales and they come out broken.

Rafael Burger

Self Portrait as a Machinist's Hammer

I was so proud of you –
I spent a day just polishing your neck,
and anchored your head to it so firmly that it would never come off.
I gave you two faces, one soft and one hard,
so that you could choose to be gentle,
but you knew what a gentle hammer is good for,
so you tried to become something else.

You turned the music on and danced.
You grew your hair out.
Do you remember your hair?
Do you remember how quick you were to crop it short
when things got bad?
It was like cutting the power lines because
you couldn't bear to hear that music playing for another second,
and then the music was gone and in its place was the whirring of gears,
which hurt your ears and you wanted it to stop but it ran on diesel
and didn't mind things like power outages.

I'm sorry – I should have given you two soft faces,
so you would have been truly useless,
and would have known not to switch the music off.

Rafael Burger