Window on the Chippewa

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WINDOW ON THE CHIPPEWA  (For Professor and Mrs. John Hepler, my sometime hosts at Mount Pleasant)

ACROSS THE RIVER’S bend,
Dourly folded in the haggard light
Lapping at our breakfast window,
Damp shrouds of undetected snow
Had slicked the late March night and set
Its sprung trees back to winter; all around
They sagged and shuddered as the slow,
Reluctant passage through gaunt skies unwound
Of lowering clouds, harried by a querulous wind.

Not six scant hours before,
We three, a company of strangers,
Peered from the warm, soft-shadowed room
Into a mirror, sealed from storm
By light seeded from remotest stars
That in our eyes burned closer, loitering there.
Words from that peace would gather home
Sparks from hushed space, each tremulous fire
Atoned at last, each voice familiar.

Now, in the morning’s flatness,
Three friends, grown silent as the curtaining mist,
Rose to a punished earth:
River sullen with decaying froth,
Small woods chastened, shorelines lost
In eddying, abandoned flakes. Then from stiff trees
A wild hammering of wings broke forth --
Shrill skitterings, defiant cries --
As squirrels filched from jays or chickadees

The remnants spread upon their table.
Cardinals came, an oriole;
A stuttering of mallards
Dropped, scattering, like discarder shades
Tossed from the varying gale... "
Head filled with their flash against the cruel
Blight on the day, surprised by birds,
I made my transient’s farewell
And left, cold music in the tires: habitual exile

Who sees yet in a place afar
That house hospitable to strangers
Where, as he dreams, bright gusts of twittering stars
Burst from its window large as light
Across the Chippewa.

PLANTING A VINEYARD

The rootstocks take eight years
from cane to wine. The earth
disavows this measurement. The glacier, in a rocky ghost, marks
nothing in the fat rods of these fields.

The land travels inside our head,
spinning on failures, furling on the mis-spent, overgrowing the mystery
and measure of a daughter.

Eighteen inches into Michigan, eight feet apart. The furrows parallel the lake and the dreams of moving things:
there is the reach of two dead men between them.

This soil unlearns the polished bone.
This sandy ground heaves over in rolling scars. There are ghosts in these wounds: Chippewa knelling in the sumac, the fox bending the moon into a slow, tight, fire.

In the wine there is the dry salt of captive things, the bleached odor of shale stitched with fossils, the rib cage of the melodious lake.

Late at night, drunk, riding the tip of the mind to sleep, my blood is a swollen pool, a hallway into prison, an inheritance of all blood dispossessed.

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