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WALT WHITMAN AT TIMBER CREEK

after an account by Justin Kaplan

Twice the fangs strike your brain.
Your left side hangs stringless for a time,
your tongue lolls like a giraffe's.
Constellations drift paralyzed, silent
while you ride the pitch and grope of vertigo,
scrabbling for chairs, old certainties.

By day a taut wire thrums in your head
at the comings and goings of vague shapes.
By night the ceaseless hiss of darkness
leaking from the room.

And so you come
to Timber Creek. Behind the thick willow
curtain, stripped naked, you wallow
in the marl pit's mud. With a stiff
brush you rub the grit like punice
into your skin and bathe in the creek's waters.

Fat, tanning, singing the name
of everything you meet
you dance your lame arabesques
to mullein blooms, to dragonflies
mated on the breeze. Ringed by
calamus, cattails, you hear cicadas
sing of seventeen years in the dark earth
nestled to a root. You wrestle
saplings supple as boys, feel
their juices stir in you. In the sweet
grass you dream of Druids, fall
in love with the bodies of trees,
hear the wind's tongue
move from branch to branch.

It does not
matter that the hawk, stropped shadow,
circles omens in the blue crown of sky.
The constellations spin and sing once more
and the limp world comes firm again.



Elizabeth McKim

DAWN

The ground is wet with mist, and first lakes
are here. Shaggy trees still dream of their roots,
and huge blocks of salt sweat in their dumb dumb
blood silence. Low-flying hawks touch down into
immense cedar trees, a dog lazily chews on a cat,
women in a circle discover the meaning of water,
the water washes over the near and far shores
of our exploring selves, words long for their mothers,
and the mothers themselves wander helplessly searching
their bodies for what they have lost; left and right-
handed children all tumble in a circle of light,
the light is pierced and penetrated by pure
darkness, the darkness protects the deep kiss,
the firm deep kiss which rises, which continues
to rise from out of the earth, and the earth
itself sighs and finds its way up, up and into
air