

Neil Shepard

WAKING UP, LOSING SELF

for Tony

Just before dawn I break camp
the others still in mummybags, mumbling good-nights.
As I cross a small crest,
the sun shivers through aspen,
dappled fossil-shade of leaves on my arms.

Higher still, pine needles give up
their brown breath, and the last scrubs
give way to the glint of mica.
Everything blends with birds
warbling me to treeline.

I shout out my name at the summit,
but it fails to echo
from the hard tongues of quartz,
long-ago white liquid song, cooled
and quiet now at timberline.
The birds too have abandoned me to silence,
to grub in the pines lower down.

While I still burn after the mossed-stone peak's
true North, the minerals in my blood begin running out of time,
drawn to magnets in mountains, to the lodestones in stars.

The whitest hairs half-asleep
in my body begin to sing
in the forest of my remaining years.