

Faith of Some Kind

Teach me how to begin. Yesterday, we smeared our hands
In pine sap to smell like sweetness, supple snap. We walked

in circles, held hands and hummed, left gifts for some river god.
We stacked stones and learned to call them cairns. Once, a monk

Told me that in each rock rested a wish. I wished to tread gently,
To press on, proud. For reincarnation: that you become a crested ibis,

And I become the kind of dog that bites bones and bristles.
For other happy things. Later, we found a felled fir, roots ripping round

Mouths out of the dirt, and said it was brave not to bow
To the wind's reaching hands. By the bridge, twenty whole trees

Reaped at the root. The boys laughed large and took a log
Into their open arms. Lifted it, and planted it back to pine, fragrant and alive.

I like the bark on these trees, etched and asking
To be touched. I imagine their roots tumbling over turned earth:

Silent squirming in the sweet grass crush. I imagine sap steeping
Skyward, the clouds stretching their mighty palms over it all.

Once, a monk asked me what I thought faith was. I told him it was trust
In God or Freedom or Nation, but I think it's more like belief in those boys,

That they could knit the tree back into the ground and see it sprouting again.
I'll tell him now that I believed in other happy things. I believed in resilience,

And rebirth. I believed that the tree would stay standing
Long after the boys took their hands away.

Portrait of My Grandfather as a Heron

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Bow down, sweet heron. Watch the sleeping
Sea breathe; the day is still gentle in its earliness.

Yesterday, the fish remembered that this land
Was once ocean and bubbled towards the boats.

The fishermen wade their ankles through silver
Bodies, too many for few human tongues,

And choose who to send back. Catch the returners:
Gentle thrashing tastes easy in the mouth. A good-bye

Gift. A thank you note. A reward for the nobility of you
Staying all these years. Soon, the clouds will hang

Pregnant over the mountain's bald stone and kiss
The forest gently. Soon, the clouds will swallow all this:

A lovely wedding. My running mother, still small sapling.
His careful hand on my shoulder. This trackless air.

I see his open eye rolling in your socket, catching all
And holding none. I wonder what it's like to remember

Nothing, to be defined only by what you see this second.
I think it can teach me how to be gentle. How to be glad.

Yesterday, I decided I wanted to be a handful
Of intangible things: a slow blink, simple death,

First snow. These things, I think, are knowable
To you. Today is as good a day as any to go far away.

Try to catch the sky before the shower splits.
Look at my sister, small with distance. She watches

Your neck, leaning leftwards. Her open mouth.
A flightless gasp. *Where do you think he's going?*

And came back
To the cornhusks that flossed our teeth
When my grandfather's mouth
Split open, gap-toothed
And smiling so young.