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WALKING THE DREAM

Eric Trethewey

Wandering in a city, a place I hardly recognize,
streets lined and littered with broken houses
lonely in their defeat, slumped beside old cars,
battered and rusting, desolate in exhausted light
near the end of day, I walk alone. And though I feel
the others, as lost as I am, hiding here and there,
watching as I make my way into the dusk,
the stench of sewage everywhere, I walk alone,
and as I walk I begin to know how I will need
to walk a long way to leave all this behind.

And then, without expecting it, I feel the city
fall behind; soon I am fighting my way
through tangles of briars, matted bracken,
and stealth is lurking in the trees . . . until I find
myself beside a small stream, follow its windings
as it widens through pastureland, descends—
water as clear as the cerulean skies of summer.
Though I pass mounds of earth resembling graves,
freshly dug and filled in, I begin to feel
that all is as it should be, all is as it must.

Undressing, I swim across to the other side
where men and women, children of all ages
are eating and drinking, drinking and laughing
and singing on an emerald lawn, where they greet
me as if I have been expected, almost as if
I am a guest of honor in underwear. How strange
it seems, how simple to be happy here.

There had been that city, spectral and forlorn,
where I had expected to labor in litter and filth,
and had found instead blessings inexplicable;
where I had found mud and ashes and offal,
I found lush grass and caroling birds;
where I had thought to wander for days in a maze,
I found instead a way out into an open world;
where I had thought to feel little more than pain,
I found a sun-glittered, unpolluted river;
where I had thought to live and die alone,
I found, beyond hope's meager rations,
something like joy, like happiness, like home.