

Two Poems · *John Ridland*

MOUNTAIN MUSIC

1. *The Tuning Fork*

Up this small stream I dropped
 a lodgepole twig:
it stuck at the lip of a falls,
 teetered and slid
and was swept back into an eddy.
 I nudged it free.

When it reaches you, lift it out,
 whang it against
the heel of your hand, and pull
 that flat *A* out
over the woodwinds and winds
 and dropping water.

2. *At the Lake* (Song)

O set down the teapot silent
see the sloop trim close to the wind's shoulder
slice the blue lake with a white feather
tag the two high jets to the white sky
bear the broad green candles of fir cones
slide the sunshine around the wood's corner
sip the flower-tea from the cup's lip
feel the sweet breath shading the forest floor
bathe the blue bruise on the white goddess' thigh—
—no bud, no boughs but by her favor!

3. *Under Duress*

The kid has to practice her fiddle—
either that or do dishes—

so she forces herself to the practice:
and the supple, authoritative

fledglings fly out from her window
finding boughs in the woods;

and against the big brag of the powerboats
scratching their screed on the slate

lake barely dimpled by rain,
and against the timid, young,

unprofound, unmusical sound
of her self as her world sounds it,

they sing the implausible wishes
that can never be silenced.

4. *Listening to the 'Waldstein' Piano Sonata*

Amid the rapid fingerwork
of the third movement
I heard a percussive clang
I had never noticed
and could not place:
it sounded more like a maul
driving a steel wedge into a log.
And so of course it was,
as it is in the mountains.
That same morning, early,
the split logs in the stove
sang a squeaky song

I'd never known they knew.
Otherwise, silence
except for the breeze through the firs.

5. *Concerto for the Left Hand Alone*

with the right in a sling—from what?
a great day's work and play, toting a bale
of wallboard, bailing—no, swamping and upending
the rowboat, playing whiffleball in two feet
of water, home runs floating a hundred feet
out on the lake, feet stubbed and scraped on the rocks
under second (a boat cushion floating, tied to a rock),
rowing halfway back from Willow when the outboard
ran out of gas—at last, a mere awkward
twist of the wrist sitting down to be polite
to a friend's father (how strange to have a father
alive when you're forty!)

I remember Ravel's *Concerto for the Left Hand*,
the heavy bass dances, the light-fingered far-away treble ripples
written for a pianist who gave his right to the War,
and try to think of all the right hands severed
in war or peace, flying off like a flock going south,
and the thirty or forty years thereafter
of single- and left-handed flight. . . .

LITERARY ANECDOTE (APOCRYPHAL)

When bold Elizabeth Bishop found
Her way to St. Elizabeth's,
She heard the prophet Ezra pound
The filthy air with one clean hand.
He beat the windows with his breaths
Like some big Persian-rug-winged moth.