The Elements Will Have Their Way

Michael Chitwood

1

It seemed the water did not want to be in the bucket. Where was I going, so long ago? The water leapt, it dove over the side of the bucket. Why did the water not want to be carried? Where did it want to go that it was not going? The bucket’s thin handle cut into my hand. My hand wanted to refuse the handle. The water bucked. It made the bucket hang my knee. The water jumped to me, darkened my clothes. Where was I going with this quarrelsome water? What spirit it had. It would not be held. It held my hand reluctantly. It sloshed and tugged. It glupped and knocked against the bucket. It was hard-headed water that would not lie down. I leaned away from it, my head cocked in the pull. What would this water do, forced to go the way I went?

2

Men were running. Men that I had never seen run before were running. The fire was going where it wanted to go. The fire went in four directions. No, five. Up too. It climbed trees, a bright, hot child. The men beat at the fire on the ground with brooms and wide rakes. The tines of the rakes sang like harps. The notes of the music were sparks. The fire swayed and dodged the men. When they smacked at the fire, it jumped.
Where the fire wanted to be was away from the men
and the men wanted it with them, wanted it close
but that is not what the fire wanted. It was wild to run.

3

The wind made the trees look like cattle
shivering their hides to keep off flies.
The wind aged the surface of the water,
all in an instant it wrinkled.
The wind sabled the long grass
in the field that would be mown later.
But for now the wind stroked the pelt of the field.
The wind found the gleam of the grass,
the white beneath the green, the sheen.
The wind ran its hand over the fur of the field
as if for the sake of that velvet feeling.

Later, in the night, the wind came against the house
in gusts that thudded and rattled the plate shelves.
Tree limbs cracked like rifle shots. The train of the wind
roared by. Its dark, invisible freight was late, terribly late.

4

Some small clods of dirt rolled back into the hole.
They hopped down the slope of the pile the machine made.
The machine’s one arm reached again and again
into the hole and curled to scoop a bucket full
and rose and swung to the side to uncurl
over the peaked pile and let fall dirt on dirt.
Some of it tumbled down the pile’s side
almost as if it were unwilling to be dug,
not ready to leave its place in the ground
to make this square hole that would be refilled later
but not with as much dirt and this dirt did not
want to be the part that would be left out.