

Bourne
toWrite...
creative writing
workshops

North from Eden

by Steve Brown

The woods are ill. Their nature: never ours.
The metal fogs above the rivers, slivers of cold,
the cracked knuckles of old trees, grasping:
this is not the landscape of something shaped
around us, for us. We were never home,
were always white shapes, running, shivering.

We made our gods accordingly:
they are dumb root, the sullen oak,
the scattered pearls of mistletoe. They are present,
if at all, within the slats of shadow, sharp glints
of light, the shards of ice. They, too, are starved:
all emergency. Our religion is endurance.

Here, fruits are scattered, thorny, hard to find,
never gifts. How the sparse berries blaze
in winter light, like beads of blood. For us,
a grace is only present in the neatness
of a kill, the throat so cleanly cut. Between the trees,
we follow all the spoor of fear, the creatures'
and our own. All hearts are clenched like fists.

Living likes foxes, breathing the same air
as wolf, the day as long as an arthritic spine
- made longer by those moments of clean panic,
when a stranger's eye cuts into yours:
the sudden freeze, stilled breath, the catch
of heart. Time passes like the sulking river,
all flattened iron, till pushed through hard crags,
its white and spluttered fury. Such is
our language shared with every creature.

We never dream. The closest lies
in the momentary flickerings of flames.
So, I never dreamed of Eden, nor of Eve:
I found her from a scenting on the breeze.
She is my cracked rib, an ache of soul,
a grip of hunger. We couple like snakes,
all coils. Her softness is as unexpected,
bright, as violets. Her eyes, my only mirror.

She is the sum of all enchantments, although,
Occasionally upon the air, a scent of pine,
a flash of magpie wing, a soft rill of spring,
the sudden opening to the sun – these also
softly persuade that life is great,
a large dumb god, whose calloused hands
can sometimes give.