

Claire Bateman

Men as Trees, Walking

There they go, everywhere you look,
with their stumpy gait—

slippage of shadow, roughness of shank,
all knuckly protuberance and scraggy skin,

like the noble hardwoods of childhood
that loosened their roots at midnight
to wander as they would.

By dawn, each was settled at its post,
all those churned-up wakes still
healing over.

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Once, We Did Everything Aloud

Now that it's all text-messaging,
how ponderous a phone call seems,
how intrusive!

Behold in our species:
a ubiquitous shyness,
newly arisen.

Yet it's not impossible to squint
toward that distance
where our ancestors still
contort their mouths
in peculiar sequences
while from the notion
of actual speech
we draw together
to shrink away.

A Diagrammed Sentence

is burnished in flight,
all extension and emergence,
transcending every controversy
between the functional and ornamental,
the technological and organic.

A diagrammed sentence
is sinuous and sleek,
serrated in profile,
whiplike in acceleration.

As you see, I came too near
a diagrammed sentence once.
I should have been warned
by those astringent fumes,
that aroma of asepsis.

Now I stump through the world,
testifying from within my encasing
of hemostatic gauze
that the disassembly of my flesh
was not executed in malice,

and bearing witness
to what I glimpsed up close:
something was missing,
something had broken loose
or perhaps hadn't ever
been captured—

not exactly an essence—
soul—distillation—
though not unlike that, either.

Only absence could have made
the sentence so swift
it failed to cast a shadow.
or leave a wake.