

Jack Stewart

Kudzu

Out in the country, the kudzu
Has swallowed the hills and all it can
Of the horizon. Even the sky
Does not look safe.
I pass the thickened 'T's of power lines
And houses that are little more
Than mounds of dark green leaves,
As if Henry Moore had taken up topiary.
The leaves are good in salad.
The vines could restrain a madman.
As a boy, I once watched a 5-bedroom house
Lifted and moved back 100 feet
Because the cliff was being eaten by wind.
Here, the red clay
Is heavy and warm,
Absorbing water to bring forth
The smothering vine that can only
Be killed with gasoline,
The darkest vine that holds dear
Whatever it touches
And will protect it so fiercely
Against intruders
Even the wind and sun are weaklings,
The very cosmos and time
No match.

A Driving Rain

The wind driving the rain sideways, and the ducks
Have sunk so far into their shoulders, they look like feathered
turtles.

The orchid tree outside our porch is having a seizure.
Even the pond is trying to get away,
The ripples racing along the bank
And not looking back —

Like the cold rain driving Adam
And Eve out of Paradise,
The wet wind that soaked them cold
To the bone and denied any cover,
And their knowledge that when it stopped
All they had tended would straighten
And the green deepen and shine.

They would outrun the rain
Into the desert,
To the earth baked hard, a sterile earth
He would have to break into the barest life
To survive.
They would remember
The sun in the cedars,
The poplars aflame,
The cherry trees thick with blossoms,
The lions' manes burning along the underbrush.

Gradually the wind slows, and the rain
Bends to the softness of a willow.
Another hour and the ducks
Are coasting the bank.
Everything breathes deeply
In the returning warmth.
The prayer in the bones has ended.
The pond is as calm as black marble,
The grass silver with light.

Jack Stewart

Farm Weather

Red-eyed, the chickens peck stupidly
Around their small dirt pen.
In the coop, they have hidden some of the eggs.
He bought two turkeys and named them Christmas
And Thanksgiving, but when the weather
Turned cold didn't have the heart
To bring the axe down. Now they sit
Like brown candle flames on the fence posts.

You see things differently in gray weather.
It outlines color like a shawl.
Things reveal themselves by contrast,
The way his dog's bark and silence
Explain each other. I whisk my hands together
To get rid of the dust from the seed I tossed.
The sky is heavy enough to snow.

The chickens go into the coop
With blood hanging from their necks.
The turkeys stay on the fence, even when
They begin to disappear in the browning light.
We stay outside, too, even until
We can feel the darkness falling. Even until
It begins to feel like our own.