

BENEATH A STAND OF ASPEN

*There is a small stand of aspen trees,
a story,
not too far from where you live,
not far from the room that defines
your dreams—neither opening nor closing—
where you sleep all clothed
within your own warm breath.*

*This closed gathering of trees
is the living narrative
of its own growth
and, therefore, must do for our own.*

*You may choose to follow this small story.
You may choose to slip from the crease
of your muted dream,
to arrive, as you might do again,
at this place—this stand of aspen trees.*

*Here you have seen the dry leaves fall
each year, after year, with the regularity
of all thin but persistent memories.*

*You have watched as if this falling, alone,
were a certain center of reference—
as if this falling could cradle
the accidents that make our lives.*

*You may wish to follow the leaf back
through the certainty that is its flight,
back to its phloemic origin,
to its abandoned point of attachment.*

*Here, after the leaf is gone,
remains the unmistakable scarring—
the cicatrice—the loud evidence
that the leaf was there—
that we are here.*

*And when the snow comes
and softens the entire world,
it softens this same aspen grove,*

*gathers on the ground and seeps beneath it
with the purity of what you suspected
all along:*

*Your mother is buried here,
and your father is buried here,
and all your issue after you
already know the depth of loam
regenerated each year, after year,
one layer atop another, spread out
like a warm woven blanket.*

*Beneath this familiar ground,
beneath this snow,
beneath the simple grace of this stand of aspen,
all precious bones are gathered, protected,
and kept.*

*And when this story moves through spring,
when the growth is full and green;
this ground of burial,
this place of healing,
this center of retrieval, gives up
its own warm nature:*

*Here in this small stand of aspen
the dark and waiting leaves,
high above the ground,
turn their gauzed and muted underside
green, in the slow breeze of the morning.*

*They vibrate, these small leaves, tuning forks
of your too short tenure here.
Like a slim sequined party dress,
they hold the promise of all your desire—
these leaves shimmer here in the light.*

*All good mornings might begin here,
in this particular stand and reach of trees—
this small and solitary world
of white and green, of black and yellow.*

—Brad L. Roghaar