

Richard Foerster

Beliefs

Autumn had begun again
glancing blows of sunlight
on the pond we fashioned
broad as a tractor wheel
but shallow, with a bronze
faun to trumpet water
summer-long for three
mottled fish that'd swelled
since May from fingerlings.

We'd watch them breach
the patter, fiery ripples
in play through waning
afternoons into chill October.
Come, we called but they
would not come to feed
after a night scrimmed
our eye into that other-
world with ice.

The nursery's expert
advised we buy a heater
to float and keep a black iris
clear through winter's solid
freezes—a portal for noxious
gas to escape on a wisping
braid of faith—and hope
our Dantean hell retain
a modicum of heaven.

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Leonardo's Vitruvian Man
could have fit within its circle:
the wicker of a prior winter's
wreath, its plaits storm-brittled,
the willow-bark in frays, rehung
under a side porch and forgotten
till it boiled into song last year
with the *teakettle-teakettle* call
of a wren that had nestled
at the bottom of the giant frame.

That November, the wreath
abandoned, I tossed it
on a burn-pile, but kept
the nest amid the worn-out
gloves and rusty trowels
in my garden bag, propped
in a far corner of the porch.
This spring, hunkered plump
within that nest, amid a puff
of cinnamon, two eyes

stared out at me, unbudgeable
in that instant as my belief
it was the same wren.
All summer she'd come
to the fountain, perch
at the trumpet's brim,
and drink, her tail flicking
like a baton to mark time
for the bright sonata
sluicing from her feet.

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Cupped in my hands, a broth
that I whisper upon, its steam
rising like an augury, bearing
the willowy gray-green
up from the bowl's glaze
on which are bossed three
small fish. Caravans once bore
items such as this from China,
celadon so pure it was believed
the vessel would break
if touched by poisoned food.
What manner of death,
I can only imagine, ensued?
And what lesson must I take
along the path today as I plod
near waist-deep in snow
to stare down into that ice-
free ring, so stark and black
against the blinding white
enormity of my disbelief?

Undines

Miscanthus sinensis

Evenings the tasseled grasses concatenate light where redwings flared their shivarees, now flown; unbraided and brushed by wind,

they caress the afterthought of an emptiness whose every breath ignites the air; till the days darken and the snows break them

I'll watch how they keen the season the way another once craned when I leant in close and sent a whisper adrift

along the length of his neck and set it shuddering—then rode those waves that swept us drowning in their coils.