

LARDER

Poems

Rhona McAdam

Caitlin Press 2022

Part 1

“Harmony with land is like harmony with a friend; you cannot cherish his right hand and chop off his left. That is to say, you cannot love game and hate predators... The land is one organism.”

—Aldo Leopold

Anna's Hummingbird

When the hummingbird plummets,
a whistling blur through the plum blossom,
it will be spring. He woos
with his crimson throat, his emerald coat.

It's the apple tree this year.
Gnarled and mossy branches
hold treasure. Two pearls
in a basket of twigs and down
and spider silk, walls spackled
with mud and lichen.

Invisible in her grassy browns she rocks
with her cradle while the wind
strums and plucks the leafless boughs
and the rain sheets its verticals.

In sunlight she glitters, green
gilding her feathers, a ruby
beneath her chin. Fearlessly small,
her language a fizz of clicks
and chitters from the highest branch,
her flight a whirling maternal buzz.

She declares
that summer is imminent
that the nestlings will fledge
together, and part
to hector and battle at the feeders
and there will be scarlet blossom
to feed them all.

Wild Bees

We, we multitude
sun-blossomed on leaves or
dark-spotting petal
pistil stamen. Knowing each
flower's golden mean.
Sweet comfort there
for our young.
Priming our baskets
with pollen.
A day's work
and a day's work and a day and a day
more. All this purpose
purpose purpose.
The weeds the woods
the garden.
Those single single
destinations, never mix this
with that:
one source in its
many places.
We fly, we crawl, we gather.
And again.
Our futures waiting to be larded.
So many homes
we have, our
dark places, combed and tunnelled,
crumbed with our comings and goings.
The neatness of our labours:
eggs entombed
with food
for an afterlife
we will not witness.
Our one season this
duty, duty.

Wasps

One false step and they seethe from a fissure
beneath my feet—a quiet spot
they've chosen. A subterranean colony
growing all summer, workers peeling my walls
and door jambs, descending to build
a palace of paper and spittle.
I stand quite still as they hasten around me.
Not yet undone, though frost is coming.

What is their larder these brown days
as the world turns fickle? The queen's scent
fades. All colour and sweetness are gone.
No wonder there's only hunger raging
now the future has launched itself
to hide in every crack and leaf and crevice.

Wireworm

Its ancestors slept for months in the bellies
of sailing ships, disembarked in ballast
gifted to our shores;
made their way like pioneers
feeding on the fat of their land.

Just as today it waxes
in the crumbling dark:
a pale, gold sliver of moon
ancient in its segmented suit
its thin translucent bristle like the chin
of a young farmer. Or the brow
of an old one, bending to the ground
to pluck a worm from its bed.

Its medium is soil, its enemies few.
When we drown it, it rises
to new life. Starvation
stills it for a season. Poison
gives it pause
to convalesce in its food beds.

In summer it decamps
into cooler depths,
rises to bask in moisture
that keeps its food supple
and succulent.

Lover of grasses
and grains, it seeks the perfume of starch
and decay. Makes catacombs
in potatoes, mines black shadows
in carrots. Noses a root tip, tastes its way
to the next, and the next. Makes ladders
inside the stems of seedlings,
resting in its tubular meal
until its host withers
and falls.

Tent Caterpillars

All the long spring
they've been hatching:
black worms, numerous
and immaterial;
spinning tents
in the branches
to house a communal appetite,
falling from their shrouds
in long black drops.
Growing into their skin
and gilding bristle,
until, lions at last,
they bask on tree limbs
in the heat of noon,
emerging from torpor
in the cooling air.

We swear we hear them
whiskering up the walls,
their thousand fingers
caressing our roofs
and chimney pots.
Their soft black patience
lingering on our windows
watching us eat.
Raking their hunger
along leaf-lines,
carving as they feed
the story of their bodies' garden,
swelling with the season,
and one day
leafing like autumn wings.