

Justice

Walker Abel

The jays scold and agitate about, blue anger
like water boiling in the redwood trees
while the black hulks of the ravens are calm
in the cool flow of the afternoon, plucking
the baby birds like plums from a bowl.
It doesn't last long. Then forest quiet restored.
The ravens back to their nest, the jays inspecting
the absence that now fills theirs. Parents each
following the dictates of their purpose.
The sly stealth of the raven, spying for opportunities.
The jay – one moment of lapse – not noticing
the hungry eye watching its flight. And for a month
the two nests just a hundred yards apart.

Existence is impartial. No favors doled out
to pious ones, to generous ones
to feathered, footed, or finned.
When the tree falls in the forest
the sound of fairness reverberates
the indifferent ground. But that love
we sometimes feel like mycelium fibers
weaving together the earth and sky? –
so beautiful, we're rocked to the roots
rooted to the rocks, feathered and fed

in the blue nest that surpasses all harm.
Yet love has preferences. Not love then
but perfect justice – all outcomes
given equal arms of embrace. We shy
from that neutrality, think it cold
like starlight above unflinching polar fields.

I go to the garden's edge, where begin
the wild oaks and redwoods, where begin
the love that birds have for their nests, love
for rounded eggs, for high-tilted yearning mouths.
Coastal fog, like kind hands muffing the ears
blocks the noise from the landfill, a fearsome presence
entrenched just three miles through forest buffer.
When justice pulls those hands away
we're no longer innocent of the large machines
burying the waste of our city.

Calmly the beast chews. Its many-clawed feet
grip tight the single tree that roots the world.
Small bees of anger buzz about its undistracted head.
I know another jay will bring their young to full flight
while another raven will lose its fledglings to hawks.
Justice holds. As for the landfill, it will reach its cap
and the big machines on wings of enterprise migrate on
to fresh predation. Meanwhile, we get Sundays off.
And starlight whimpers not at the plucking away of polar ice.