

Walking Tour

*...How he submitted—. Loved.
Loved his interior world, his interior wilderness,
that primal forest inside him, where among decayed tree trunks
his heart stood, light-green.*

-Rilke, "The Third Elegy,"
trans. Stephen Mitchell

I.

Turn away from the white-capped McKenzie
by the sign that says Blue River Reservoir 4 miles
and drive up the hill where you are already
made lighter by the trees' stillness
rising through Douglas firs and Pacific silver firs
Western red cedars and incense cedars and hemlocks
around rocky bends where the road
sometimes surrenders
to the force of water underneath the soil

Cross the spot where the landslide
"picked up a whole grove of them trees
and left 'em still standing straight up on the road"
risk a look to your left at the blue glacierblue
bloodblue water that opens up
past a thin scrim of forest
and promises no bottom like a sky

II.

Turn away from the reservoir
at the place where the road narrows and rises
first following Lookout Creek
and then aiming for the ridge
FR 1506 FR 1508 Sec 401
everything that was quiet before now refines itself
into a multitudinous clarity of voice

The creek is nearly inaudible
mumbling in its bed down in the ravine
three woodpeckers tap out rounds
at three different pitches
the Douglas squirrel chirps its warning song
from a low branch with eye contact
you have grown unaccustomed to in the city
telling you not to turn back

but to pay attention

III.

Follow the narrow footpath through a waiting room
of trees some standing some lying down
softened by mosses water time
each trunk as large or larger than your wingspan
each once-tree now growing around its new names
home food shelter witness

Can you imagine a world where our bodies
could continue like this after falling
where two barred owls could stretch
the membrane of their call across the forest
tuning everything between them
into the singular voice of a drum