

NORTH OLYMPIC PENINSULA 1976

Michael Daley

“The physical exertion level and work efficiency of tree planters is amongst the highest ever recorded in human occupational performance studies.”

—D.G. Trites, Simon Fraser University

It’s such a project to shift our love off the lives of others,
to leave the heroics of betrayal to singers of quiet despair
and listen to the layered sheets of coastal waves
whose tribal mysteries drum below hundreds of high, craggy
acres where we’ve come to plant the clearcuts of North America.

To do a job, to gradually and each alone
climb through slash of fallen industrial waste upslope,
drive every ten feet a wedge-like hole into puddled soil,
insert a foot-long Doug fir seedling,
tamp with a mud-caked boot—here, where we joke:

this honest place should host the inauguration ceremony—
oompah brass bands, robust podia speakers, the Robert Frost poet,
the full monstrosity: gowned First Ladies, geriatrics of former regimes
solemn before muddy slash: dead trees made aliens for one another,
rain-soaked, burn-blackened by spin-offs of the history of Napalm.

A sad joke we tell on the slopes—we took a breather, had a smoke,
then we edged our way alone up cliff faces scarred with stumpage,
and plunged one tree after another into the ground —love those
sideways sheets of rain.

for Finn Wilcox & Tim McNulty

A WALK BENEATH THE NEAR EMBRACE OF TREES

for Willa

Michael Daley

Now a hiking trail
maintained from the lake as far as the County line,
this railroad grade's once serviceable track
must have hummed for summer travelers.

Chins cupped on their palms or standing with binoculars
to glass the skiffs and fishing gear,
they gazed from train windows,
but couldn't guess
the rails beneath them
would fill with gravel and weeds, and rust,
and this temple of alder would rise where they passed.

The trees lean over the grade
like the spines of young swimmers,
and glitter in the sun.
Loftier firs and virgin cedar hushed
back when the steam engine whistled
and slowed its summer glide
down to the lakeside depot, also gone.

This is where I am.
The dog scares up an eagle
who rises so quickly
her tail feathers clip the cattails,
sunlight sparks off golden talons with a captive vole.

In the weedy distance,

though she'd like to be hidden
when jackhammers echo down at the lake,
a small black bear and her slovenly cub
dawdle—so slowly
one moment might not slip
inside the next.

I'LL BE KEEPING A THOUSAND GUITARS SAFE INSIDE THIS MAPLE

Michael Daley

The logger's toddler son
who wants her down
can't live long enough
to harvest raw planks from
or hear flamenco fingers
rake across acoustic boards
sliced from deep inside my tree.

Arisen true out of coastal soil,
axis pitched to the star frame:
Orion's Belt a whip of pearl,
Cassiopeia learned when I
trespassed and slept rough
on a stranger's unlit driveway.

Rattling Bigleaf Maple leaves
applaud the all-night-long howlers
up that chunky burl and bark
enraged a hundred fifty years
by stem by limb by massive limb
spinning on her fleet wheel of roots.