Up Bear Creek Canyon

James Den Boer
But, in the warm following breeze
and light slip of jacaranda blossoms
along our street, among the steady
thrusting of new shoots and tendrils
answering the winter rain, I go on,
still not still, still lashed,
still listening within
to the interminable muttering.
I bow my head and lean into the wind.

Up Bear Creek Canyon / James Den Boer

Out at dawn again, after the storm—
why do I wake so early?—
the creeks are rushing and turning
the clicking rocks in their beds.

I walk the fire road,
across the three canyons
which divide our ranch,
away from the creeks' mumbling,
toward the old stillness
of high ground, toward sacred
still places in the stands
of bay laurel, where ferns are cut
by thin hooves of small deer.

Deep in Bear Creek Canyon,
where the laurel's sharp leaves
drift around my boots, I hear
the tiny mew and snarl
of cougar kits playing in sage
a hundred yards above me—
they are hunting each other,
shaking drops from the wet branches,
rushing from ambush.

The mother, small, brown-gold,
a touch of white and black
at her throat, stills them,
and takes a few steps down
the slope, looking for me.
We stare, as the rushing settles; we are not deaf, there are no other sounds. High clouds, thick, white, absorb all except the necessary signing of ourselves: breathing, boot scuff, the whisper of denim and my leather sleeve, the beginning of her hiss or scream.

We are so close to each other, we are not cut off, we are connected. We are the only ones left to say anything—

I shout,

and we disappear into the rushing of the world, the wind rising in the sycamores and laurels. A stone clatters down the cut bank.

The Forbearance of Animals / James Den Boer

Without understanding, they exist with only the poetry of their bodies, not saying Rise Up but rising up on their thin tendoned legs. They are forever unsaved and never damned; they think only about themselves.

Under pressure, they break without guilt, and are happy to save their skins. Without a literature, they taste the green alfalfa or lick muzzles streaked with blood, nervy and serious. Not art, they freeze like statues

and blend colors. Without patience, they wait. They do not blame, but they have no forgiveness. Enduring as evolution, they never worship. They do not pray, or bless us; they do not know their mercy toward us.