

1975

# Up Bear Creek Canyon

James Den Boer

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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.