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In the Woods, 1957

John Spaulding

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Five Poems · *John Spaulding*

SUMMER AT THE CROFT

And the rain came in daysful. Each of us
ate what we could—crayfish we caught
in a swamp, oatmeal, broth
and batter noodles. At evening
the smell of wet goats came in the windows
and we could see black raspberries
hanging like bulletholes through the gray leaves.
We would tell ghost stories to scare ourselves
and make footprints with toes missing
until our minds went flat and we thought of nothing
but that big black bed that lay open
up the narrow staircase in the attic.
The father meantime emptied the warm milk
onto his crumbled cornbread, added syrup
and began to sing. It was his soft sounds
we caught in our net of sleep just before
the screen door slammed and someone yelled
that the dogs had tore up a groundhog on the porch.
The rains began heavy again next day around noon.
But for a few hours then we had the sun and some of it
fell in a cup by the window where a stiff dry flower
stood like a Scotswoman just stepping from a brown dress.

IN THE WOODS, 1957

I disappear on the way home from school
into the woods of the neighborhood,
where I have no friends
except two cigarette butts and a coffee can.
The sky is green, and no one knows I am missing.

I watch the sumacs smack their arms in the wind.
I crumble a fistful of sticky red flowers
and listen to the four o'clock train.
I did not go to the barber shop after school
or to choir practice.
The wind blows my smoke over the pine trees.
Through the leaves I can see a section of Highland St.
Kids on their way home from school, nurses
driving home from the hospital. Perhaps
my father will forget about the haircut and no one
will ask about choir practice.
If there is a war here
I will hide in the mountains south of town,
where there will be others like me, in camouflage,
waiting, with cigarettes and machine guns.

WAKING

I have forgotten to set the alarm.
I slowly enter my opium-filled body.
This morning is soft enough to allow
me to move. The jar of sleep opens.
The pool drains. And bees fill the house.
(My cat paws at them.) From far away
the sun is struggling to get out of its box.
I peer over my lower lid—
something is dangerous.