

North Country, with Loon

1

Here, it's the Loon
moves the landscape —

the eye across it —
glides down, a wingtip

close enough to water's
surface to break

the tops of ripples
moving across, toward.

Settling in a particular
circle, equidistant

from far and near
shorelines, two

glide in, join twenty.
A third flaps up. Is unsettled.

2

The body
fills silk well
makes skin frictionless,
a smooth conductor,
porous so that
the oils mix,
the heat of touch
dissipates
to the silk,
the energy without
distraction
flows into,
ripples across
your skin,
widening,
a disturbance
over the lake
of your back,
wingtip of a Loon.

With nothing
of consequence to say —
the past flaps, distant;
wind swirls cold at our backs,
and then warmer —
we lay in the present, wrapped
in thin silk and each other.

Some minutes have walls,
a door to pass through
to the next; it is
a consequence of thinking
all movement is forward.

When we separate,
swing our hot legs to the floor,
the cold air is nearly
astonishing, and we wrap,
standing now, and step
by step like this,
we move in the direction
of the Loon's talk
on the lake: the next moment,
and the next.

We invoke the great loves
of the past; summon them
with specific words
to our ritual. We know
what we're to do: we've chosen
a place, and dressed.

And they come, these
great loves, across time,
or so we can say.
The shudder of the candle's flame:
that's them. They have not altered.
The strain of their passion
is mythological: their eyes closed;
breath rushing into them
and back out.

We dance now to join them.
We say our words, leave tokens.
Even as we move away
an image of us at this instant
stays with them, dancing, removed
from any line of starts or endings.
Look back at them:
even though their eyes show strain,
they dance.

Camera loaded, the light
near sundown blushes
the gray, beat wood
of the boathouse, flashes
along arcs of the waves.
Don't photograph this. Don't render it
immutable now. Let it
distort, let it unravel,
reconstruct itself.
This image will retell
this here and now for years,
without conclusion —
It will never change,
it will always be different,
we will never agree. For now,
let the light slip down
around you. Don't
remember this yet.

What comes
comes. Today
the sun.
Loon's voice
far off
guided me
in dreaming.
What significance?
If it / had led
to you —
Over the
composting leaves,
single direction
not circles
over humps
of hills,
followed it:
Loon's call ...
the pitches
slide up —
a dream
is it?
The sun
behind you
this morning,
your face
a shadow.
You mimic
Loon's talk;
take me
under you.

Again the road. Again
the press of destination,
the demand of arriving.
This traveling is process:
so much to shut out
moving from one place
not home to the next.
You read and dream.
I watch ahead and watch ahead.
So much to anticipate:
the car somehow or me.
Your hand swings over once
and drops up on my thigh;
my charged attention crashes
out from me, a wave up
the skin of your arm.
Startled you look up at me:
I am hard watching ahead, waiting.
Almost brittle.

Memory slips.

The tranquility of this place
is less a lie
than an exaggeration:
even as parts of it fall away —
respecting winter's approach —
it remains a study
in optimism: the return of,
the resplendoring,
the coming back will occur.

Viewing and reviewing
this landscape stretching away,
curling down and away,
the past slips in chunks.
The lake's surface freezes
pint by pint; beneath,
the fishes, the long paler weeds
undulate on the threshold of living.
This tranquility has other names.

Memory slips, the light turns
oblique, the lake is sealed,
and I am at peace with this.
What does not survive
feeds what does. Memory slips;
a next season comes.

This morning I would have sworn
a thousand Loon murmured
in a circle, unbroken around us,
waiting for some sign or motion:
the raising of an arm,
a disembodied word in tongue
closer to their own than ours.
But it was rain,
persistent, wearing away
edges and outcroppings
with immortal patience.
You rose, a pure black movement
across the dark room, spread,
with a finger, the stiff curtain,
and in the seeping light
became eternal an instant,
unperturbed, unpolitic, speechless,
unhuman. A shiver
ran the length of your shoulders
and part of you took flight,
wheeling through that crack, that seam
for safekeeping, and you returned then
to the bed in the less dim room,
ran your tongue lightly
over the edges of my ear,
and murmured something — about rain? —
in no language I could name.

For the half-minute after
I turn the last light out,
the retina opens wildly,
seeking some blush, some
pinpoint of light for balance,
and I move, utterly blind,
toward you in bed, with all
legendary obstacles between us:
the walls, the blind openings
through them, the lakes
of the inexpressible.
I am a journeyman at this.
Slowly through the house,
face up as though reverent,
my fingertips read direction
and lead me to the door
you lie behind. Though you sleep,
your breathing breaks its rhythm
at my approach, and quiets
altogether when I slip, naked
against your back and trace
lightly on your skin the words
that begin all legendary stories:
I have come this far;
I had gotten this close.

Paul T Hogan
From Points of Departures, 2008