



urgency and the sun

*FIVE POEMS ABOUT TRAIL RUNNING
(OR--POEMS WRITTEN
IN MY HEAD,
MOSTLY IN THE DARK,
WHILE TRAIL RUNNING)*

by emily zebel

context

IN THE SUMMER OF 2015 WE BOUGHT OUR FIRST HOUSE. IT WAS A MESS, AND IT TOOK THE SPAN OF FOUR MONTHS TO GET IT LIVABLE AND ACTUALLY MOVE IN. I DIDN'T RUN. BUT THAT'S A DIFFERENT STORY, FOR A WHOLE OTHER SET OF POEMS. THIS IS ABOUT FINALLY FINDING THE OPENING TO RUN AGAIN, A FEW MILES FROM OUR HOUSE, ON A SPINE OF MOUNTAIN, ALONG THE DARLINGTON AND APPALACHIAN TRAIL, IN MOSTLY DARK HOURS, BY THE LIGHT OF MY HEADLAMP, SOMETIMES WITH MY DEAR RUNNING PARTNER, JENN, BUT MOSTLY ALONE. THIS IS ABOUT SOLITUDE. MY NEED FOR IT. THE SHORTAGE OF IT, AND THE URGENCY FELT TO GRASP IT IN WHATEVER HOURS I CAN, SUNLIGHT OR NO. THIS IS ABOUT HOW I MAKE SENSE OF LIVING, AND WHAT KEEPS ME ALIVE.

-ENZ, DECEMBER 2015

IN BEGGING THE TREES TO TAKE ME FOR THEIR OWN

It's settled then, says the jury of trees. You will become one of us.
We'll fasten you to this rocky mantle forever, roots down,
days strung together
by nothing more than a strap of stars and an empty but
inexhaustible sky.
You must rise and shake, turn your back and let the named world
quiver and disperse.
You must let go of the vestige of things named long ago, and things
you thought you came close to understanding.
The abrasive sound of modern life slips into foam. The great expanse
of modern life
fits onto
the head
of a pin.

Listen. The cumulative quiet of winter
is upon us.

And the gentle, silent discipline will come.
And the eventual feeling of unfamiliar lightness will come.
And the dim half-knowledge of things ancient and sacred will at last
touch everything, and enter everywhere
like a sunbeam:
legs to root, hair to leaf.

Are you with us?

ON THE RIDGE I START & END

Forget who I was.

I am the new light made by the darkness, the day decanted, and I am a skein of yarn untangling rapidly. The invisible progress made by the feet. I am the landscape and a pop-up book with its one-dimensional trees and love and birds pop-popping and looking for some roundness to take root in. I am that landscape. The reshaping of memory. The campaign against the real. I am seeking a hand without fingers and a home without frame. A book read by children. A book read in reverse. I am a garden provided, and therefore a provider of things. I am losing sight of how the real world operates. I am very high, scaling higher. I am transgression. The body loosed. A cliff. Clouds. Heat. Then, the universe at my feet

URGENCY & THE SUN

Here is a room for all sides of myself—
a forest.

In it my body stretches out
to all four corners
of the earth. In it I have
no mass, and pass through
the world
undetected.

My mind is quiet
and cloudless as a dream.

And I sing into the hollow
of each tree, like one would sing
at the sea—

hands cupped around my mouth,
feet grasping the cliffs.

I have one more mile before
the road, the car, the
inevitable snap and then—
the return of the everyday all around.

I ask the trees
one last time to bend me
into an absolute of light
and they do.

THE OLD COUNTRY

Every night the cold stars stand up.

They radiate.

Every animal leavened by winter feels this and looks up,
then burrows down.

How do we lose sight of things? I push on, wings out, head down. Something
is ready
to uncover itself.

I am a lighthouse. My headlamp swings out
through the half-light and catches a tail, a branch—it pendulums
in the air, holds the memory of something for a minute
like the moon and a cloud
moving away from one another.

What of this human world, where objects can alter people's behavior
and life itself can be worn and discarded like cloth?

Here is rock, here is root—outward signs
that point to an inner altar.

What if I could be weary and never winded? What if
I could track the universe out
to its bare edges, what if there I could find the door and trust—

it's the place we lived in once, and, if I must, will run after
every day.

DAUGHTER

One. Two. Here, of all places. I grumble—
if I ever get a hold of you
you'll never eat candy
as long as I live.

Six. Se-ven.

I first wanted for you a future.

Then, I thought longer—a clearing:

birch and moss steeped in a magic pattern of light,
a broad winged space
to hold you more securely
than my own limited senses ever could.

Twelve. Thir-teen.

Did I tell you I was never a mother but an avalanche in waiting?
Did I show you the trail? The trees? The pathway my electricity
travels?

Fif-teen. Six-teen.

Life is a travelling image. And you do whatever it is with it
that turns the wheel of sensation inside. And you sing whatever it is
you want to sing: maybe find what it's like
to become the aural equivalent of riding
through a cloud; maybe find what it's like
to have the blindly reciprocated affection
of an animal
or a landscape
or come to know the immensity of distance
that love can cover.

Eigh-TEEN. Nine-TEEN.

Because your childhood will end, and there will be
no path back to it. And all a mother can hope for
is that you return once in a while
warm
and intact.

TWENTY. Ready or not, here. I. come.

