

California Wildflowers

It seems a simple joy
to greet the flowers by name:
Tidy Tips, Goldfields, Blue-Eyed Grass,
Crane's Bill and Cream Cup,
Sticky Monkey Flower,
Mule's Ears, Owl's Clover,
Sun Cups glossy by the path,
Milkmaids in shade,
Lupine and Poppy on the slope,

but to the immigrant who after 40 years
still speaks with foreign intonation,
these are pet-names for familiars
precious as friends,
who speak in a language without words
of soils: clay and serpentine,
of rains and drought,
the way the lineaments of the land
impress themselves,
the way we learn to belong.

In Hindsight

Faded words seen on a weather-beaten poster:
The shadow of the past holds the future hostage
Most likely promoting some political event
Long gone and almost forgotten.

The shadow of the past holds the future hostage.
I recall a lecture by my history professor,
Long gone and almost forgotten.
He spoke of the two World Wars.

I recall a lecture by my history professor:
Nations wage war for complicated reasons.
He spoke of the two World Wars,
Arrogance and pride that cause unspeakable deaths.

Nations wage war for complicated reasons.
In hindsight most of our reasons seem insane:
Arrogance and pride that cause unspeakable deaths,
As if the lessons of history have no value.

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Most likely promoting some political event.
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Winter Greens

Fresh compost a fragrant crumble in my hand,
damp with the first of the season's rain.
More rain on its way, and winter dark
that echoes an inner bleakness.

This is the act of reconciliation:
muscle rhythm of shovel and wheelbarrow,
load upon load to fill the planting box.

This is the gesture of hope:
to remember the taste of fresh-cut salad greens
and act on it.

The brown string, soft with age,
bobbles in my hand as it unwinds
from dirt-caked sticks to mark the row.
Scratch of trowel through earth
to form the furrow.
Almost inaudible rustle of seed from packet.
Weightless in my hand and hard,
they lose themselves in the receiving earth.

This is the sound of faith:
a rake tamping down soil over new plantings—
snap peas, bok choy, lettuces—
tines on the diagonal, first one direction
then crisscrossed down the line.