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## Earth Star

Mushrooming in the fall, in the north part of the valley, a group of us leaves our cars on a logging road and delicately tramples the woods. We're not on a hunt for precious chanterelles or elusive lobsters. Instead we're collecting specimens to study the world of fungi.

Heads down, rain swept, we gently pry and scoop the shaggy manes, the slippery jacks, orange witches' butter, tiplers' bane, Alaskan gold, cafes of tiny pink cocktail umbrellas, miniature reefs of creamy coral.

Logged two or three times, the woods are grazed and thin, wrecked with beautiful litter: lichen-crusting branches, broken trees, cow patties, muddy ruts filled with yellow leaves, needles, shredded pine cones, and electric bolts of larch and cottonwood.

I don't know how or when, but I wander away, get lost. I hear nothing but cawing crows, see no one, nothing but trenches of tangled logs and unreadable paths while all around me mushrooms quietly conduct their chemical experiments on the forest floor.

Then the rain stops. In sunny spokes of light the forest preens and patters. A nuthatch skips scritch-scratch dancing down a nearby fir. No map, no phone, no compass — an orbit of solitude. In my hand, a cloth bag of mushroom beings.

Soon I find a barbed wire fence, follow  
it to a dirt road which leads to a larger road,  
where two guys in a truck stop and give me directions  
to town. They'll try to find my group and tell them  
I am found. Except no one had noticed that I was lost.

Far more lost are the fungi, tumbling onto tables  
at the community hall. Damp, trailing moss, our pickings  
lie unveiled, dozens of naked, glistening,  
amputated, knobby treasures. Gills and pores  
are probed and specimens named with book in hand.

Amongst them sits a marvel called the earth star.  
Its rind unpeels and opens into the shape of a star  
to reveal a globe balanced on that star-skin pedestal.  
If you squeeze the ball, puffs of black spores toot out.  
In awe, we crowd around this entrancing toy,

in awe at the complexity of life, of nature, revealed  
in this one room so far from the *mysterium*  
of forest — stunning species, intricate puzzles  
of evolution — splayed before us, pierced,  
lost again, yet still at home, on this earth star.

## Red-Tailed Hawk

*for my father, October 11, 2009*

The morning of the day you died  
a red-tailed hawk launched over  
the light-filled valley. All that air,  
and you struggled for breath.

New grief is exhausting. All the memories.  
It's hard to carry them around  
day and night. My dreams  
are long and stormy, tears  
blot my thought.

From touch to mind,  
from then to now, you made me.  
From the first track laid in the brain,  
to my hand on your stone-like head.

The wildness of a back alley childhood  
was rich with your gifts — in summer  
raspberries and carrots from gardens you grew,  
in fall, shiny as Christmas wrappers,  
decapitated mallard heads toppled  
by the bloody axe, the feathers, the books,  
your stuttering words of love,  
the many schools, our arguing  
about justice, our restless moving  
across country, rivers, lakes and granite.

The morning of the day you died  
was the first killing frost,  
hunting weather.  
In the Arctic blue sky you loved,  
the red-tailed hawk circled,  
spiralling further and further away,  
its tail lustred open  
and tendoned like a pale hand.

The hawk will ride the currents  
of my memory of this day,  
a luminous bird banking in flight,  
your bed wheeled out the door,  
out of sight for always,  
as you sink into what's cold and bitter,  
fall into a thought that's air.

## The Flicker Tree

Sometimes in the fall  
I walk by a ponderosa pine  
and glimpse inside  
among its sunlit branches  
and orange bark  
flashes of red, rustling  
and pulsing like blood-filled veins  
or inner fire.

The tree is filled  
with northern flickers  
who, in other seasons, are  
solitary birds or simply coupled.

Perhaps they gather  
in these flaring congregations  
for comfort,  
wracked by their own autumnal cries  
so piercing and sorrowful  
that when I hear them  
I too am candled  
by freshened embers of grief.



## Owl in Dust and Ash

*in memory of Sylvia Russell*

When a bird hits a window,  
it sometimes leaves a trace  
upon the glass, a bit of down  
or gluey speck from a crushed  
insect, wet eye, or broken  
feather. For days the mark  
reminds you of the thud that stopped  
you, drew you sick at heart  
to the window sill  
to see the bird still or stunned  
on the patio stone.

The fall my dear friend was dying,  
an owl crashed into her bedroom window.  
Instead of tuft or smudge, it left  
a whole spread-wing powder print  
of itself, its coating of summer dust and ash  
halo-smashed onto the pane of glass.  
For weeks, no rain or weather washed away  
that x-ray etching. We watched fall  
drop into winter through its transparent  
head, body, and cloud-filled wing.  
I knew I'd never see the like again,  
not she, so looming and vivid in my life,  
not an owl clocked  
full speed at the moment  
between flight and blow.

## Snk'lip

The only Okanagan word I recognize  
is your name  
slinker, road clipper,  
poodle eater,  
howling away in glee  
as I phone the city, the SPCA,  
the vet: "What should I do  
with this dog leg I found?  
The white curly hair's still on it!"  
Howling, as I pathetically put it  
in the freezer: "Who's missing  
their puppy?" As if you care, yip yip yipping  
and rolling in the bunch grass, rubbing off  
the gold-grey colours,  
knocking the grass seeds out of their towers  
topsoil flying off like fur in a fight  
your jacket now plastered  
with billboard bling, loving it  
strutting around with garish ad jewellery  
golf, lingerie, hamburgers, dentists, condos  
sunglasses the size of swimming pools  
hanging onto your real estate buddies  
Stoehler, Swindell, and Profit,  
panting on their leashes, leashes  
the size of bulldozers  
kicking out those homeless  
snakes, owls, pine trees  
and other weaklings.  
You love the greed, the gas,  
who wants a story if you can get a deal?  
Rip up the place!  
Rip! Rip! Rip!

You'll be the new road,  
the gravel pit, the Hummer, the toothy  
subdivision with the maniacal grin  
crawling up the hillside  
pulling your magic shit behind you,  
your RVs, your boats, your garbage cans, your sprinklers,  
waving down at the appalled lake.  
Hey! you teeter on the dynamite,  
Look at how high I can go!

Look at me!