

TWO POEMS



John Burnside

SPRING SNOW

It's the gift of a brighter
world, when a snowfall

blanks out the green, the bandstand,
the home for the blind

where workmen are standing amazed
as the quick flakes

cover the roof they have just
dismantled.

The home is gone:

they're building apartments now,
erasing the thumbprints and stains

from the upper rooms,
gutting the staircase, widening the doors.

We think of the gardens to come
in another year,

the neat buds of tulips and scillas
vanishing under a sudden

downpour of white.

It's
the snare of a brighter world,

when we walk to the head of the loan
and turn around

to look back, over the firth,
on empty space,

a gap we can fill with our own
wheatfields and steepes,

cattle at pasture,
beech woods and smoky yards,

a gap for our private
becoming, who might have been

the blind in their schoolrooms
announcing their presence in Latin.

SCAVENGER

It's autumn all afternoon:
the light between dog and wolf,
a cold rain fuzzing the trees

on Barton Road. I'm listening;
if anything exists besides ourselves
I'll hear it on the air:

the creak of water stalling in the pipes,
a fall of soot, the first milk of decay
filming the bones of mice beneath the stairs

—a softer voice than any I'd imagine,
giving itself away
in the husk of dusk.

You won't allow cats in the house,
and even our quietest moments are immune
to badgers and hunting owls.

though somewhere along this street, a sleeping woman
drifts in a sulphurous tide of flying ants,
and lightning spirits brush the holly trees

at Gosden, where the old men lie awake,
fishing for catfish and dace
in a river of static.

So much of flesh is grass, you find yourself
in ramsons and the smell of bittercress,
in mullein and foxgloves, lighting the summer nights,

and golden iris hanging in the porch
to keep us safe. You bury stones and feathers in a jar
to drive all thought of evil from the door,

while I construct this tunnel in the dark:
cockchafers; worms; a cobweb of blood on my tongue;
and all the time I long for transformation,

subsisting in the shadow of a house:
containing, like a cyst, my father's soul,
his cryptic love, his taste for carrion.