

Pool of Aspen

After Forty Years

"Camp where you can hear water."

—my father

The grove in the lake now
shimmers like hammered gold.
Farther on, the lake skin darkens, tightened by shadow
and slate blue light before dusk,
as though the water striders stitch its surface
taut enough to be walked upon.

My father claimed he could walk on water as a child
in hip boots worn by my grandfather
when he died from a seizure, falling face down
in a ditch before my father turned three.
I try to believe now
in buoyancy—that yearning . . .

which connects to the farm, just sold,
and to the field pond, gone before I was born.
That it might someday come back
was my father's dream and my own:
his out of memory and drought, mine
out of romance with bodies of water

like this high unnamed lake where my brothers
once brought me, where their pebbles turned
the silt of the south end smoky,
but the north side over rock stayed clear
through any weather I've seen.
We might have spoken names
like *Slate Water*, *Smoke Cove*
Now it's *Gold Lake* below aspen,

and I imagine waking in the dark
to a pale glow of white trunks,
autumn leaf-tremble discernible

to night vision, where the outlet
offers its faint pouring
over all we name thirst.

—Dixie L. Partridge

Luggage for one leaving

You are required to keep the poundage low:
two large cases and a carry-on,
what you take for months overseas.
In a year of famine, you have volunteered
for hunger in a strange language
you begin to force onto your tongue,
words affirming ways of irrigation:
seeds salvaged, sprouts toward green
in the fields.

What you need most was there
before you packed, not fire in the eyes,
but deeper, not things you have
but what you enjoy.
You've planted vegetables and flowers
in old tires—a family's garden;
pruned massive lilac trees and honeysuckle
that crowded paths; painted fences
and repaired collapsing sheds
in that dying farm town.

When I walk back
toward my car and education, the acquiring
of whatever will allay my dread of poverty,
I carry nothing from the airport
but an ache and tremble in my hands.

From Dixie L. Partridge, *Watermark*
(Upper Montclair, N.J.: Saturday Press, 1991).