

Poems by Clinton Larson

The Coming of Winter

A gust preens the hedgerow,
And cold intervenes in the flow:
A cornstalk is borne in a field
And pirouettes against a shield
Of light over snow, where it leaps
Skyward into rain; a peak sleeps
In light, then vanishes in the steel
Dark, hidden in storm, the feel
Outward, white wires in the cold.

Deputy's Report

I came from the windward side of the peak,
Where wraiths of shadows rise over ledges
And toss away into the rolling air.
Then I reined and rode down the northern ravine
Of Malad Pass, over drifts of snow, to Jake's
Cabin. I had remembered his guilt and tousled
Worry, as if he had arisen suddenly
From a dream of bearing south over canyons
Of the Colorado where the breath hovers
In awe before you move to feel the canyons
Of being. For day closes like that,
Gulfs beyond and glimmering the shades
Of evening in the mauve light as you wait
On the bluff of your spirit, seeing no way.

He waited at the door, grisly in the dark cold,
Evenly calling to me: "Arthur! Is it you?"

*Dr. Larson is a professor of English at Brigham Young University.

I said. "Yes," beside the snow-dusted logs
 That wisped frost gathering like a hand
 And making strands of bark stiffen angular
 And sharp, like flint.

He asked into the darkness:

"Why have you come? To fetch me home to Malad?"

"No. To see if you were well. You haven't come in
 To spend the winter. The nights of a mile
 And a half high can seep into the mind like winds
 Over the rock slopes above the pass and keep you
 Here."

"Why have you come? Carswell died
 Across my line, on my fence that he ripped down
 And pulled into my grain."

"It will not do,
 Jake. Come in as you honor the crest of grain
 That shapes and mellows the hill you keep.
 Gather the peace of gulls wandering
 Against the clouds."

"I will die for what I've done.

No."

And he turned like a shouldering steer
 Into a stall, his gait rolling him forward, face
 Set misshapen, worry in a devotion of pain
 That he knew must end. Then he looked back,
 To catch my resolve like a rock thrust up
 And cragged like a Fury killed. He drew his question
 Into him and kept it there as he closed
 The door. The lamp dimmed, coasting out,
 And around the cabin the cold seethed darkly,
 The cabin itself like an outcropped boulder.
 Then a bullet slammed into the silence, the sound
 Muffling over the new snow.

I found his body,
 My hands fumbling for a wick to light,
 But touching him coldly in the darkness.
 I stepped back into the open doorway.
 "Jake?"

And the grass beyond the room
 Rose before the wind, freezing, gathering
 Lobes of frost in the light of my mind.

Autumnal

Frost visits a pall mid-air; the upland mists
 Hush silvering whitegold into a cottony patina
 Of evergreens; a round and luminary moon persists
 Through drifting halos of weather. A concertina
 Wheezes in the hollow's musicale of firelight:
 Schottische or dancing in the square, a voice
 Calling home, and the star of hands slight
 The dark reverence of shadows, as if the choice
 Of a saucily tossing head moving and flaring red
 Upon red out of flame as the firefly sparks
 Ascend, swirl, and flicker out. But what sped
 Across the ebon mantle of vales, across parks
 Of hoarfrost fields and lawns, riding on light?
 Down in the caves of Walpurgis autumn's dark
 Is the mirroring spring where wizards plight
 Their fell secrecy, whispering: hounds bark
 Miles away, inquisitive in brambles and sedge
 For some white fur, and a thin scream wanes
 In a rustle of leaves. What oath or pledge
 Repines in the mindlight of autumn and reigns
 In me as I scan these still meadows of night?
 Am I the daemon I strike from the imperium
 Up the sky, far east, or the entailing fright
 I smooth in me, primeval in my cold delirium?