

Moving On

Late October. Late afternoon.
Butter-colored light
more particle than wave.
Cloudless sky a darkening blue
replete with possibility.

Leaves, for the most part,
down. Groves of towering trees.
Up-thrust branches limned in gold,
alive with the chattering foliage
of a thousand birds.

Here and there
a recognizable call.
Robins cluck.
Red-winged
blackbirds trill
of cattails in the marsh.

But, really, it's one wild
wheezing twittering
canopy of song.
A score of species --
grosbeaks, thrushes,
warblers, and wrens,
blackbirds, sparrows,
vireos and veeries --
letting go of summer nests
and territories.
Merging, re-membering
a greater whole,
voices orchestrating
the linking up
of individual trajectories.

One tree-full falls silent.
A moment of concentrated
stillness, then the bird-leaves
leave that tree,
fall upward,
become a river,
rising and dipping
flowing over tree tops,
following the curve of the earth.

Tree by tree by tree they do this:
first some invisible signal,
then a local silence
in the midst of diminishing song,
then departure -- the beating
of a hundred wings,
the sibilant sound of good-by.

They'll fly all night,
over continents and oceans,
gathering more voyagers as they go,
navigating by the stars
or the earth's magnetic fields
or some internal map
only they understand.

It's that they leap towards the darkness
with such abandon.
It's that they know the way,
that causes me to turn full-circle,
arms spread like wings,
beneath the emptying trees.

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