

Prelude:
Mueller Lake Park

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i.

The trees are many. Someday shade will come,
but now the trail's a blister, burning more
with each spring day, the summer tedium
of heat and triple digits still in store.

The trees along the trail are neophytes,
too young to offer comfort, even in
full leaf, a decade from the width and height
to shelter. Bony branches all too thin
and not a single trunk that's wider than
my thigh, these trees were planted every nine
to thirteen feet apart, too close a span
eventually. That's future talk. Resign
yourself to heat, aware the trees deceive—
implore the skies for rain, a small reprieve.

ii.

Implore the skies for rain, a small reprieve,
a steady shower, not a strong barrage
of wind like last week's storm, whose rush and heave
tossed birds like paper napkins and dislodged
three weeping willows from their moors, but left
us little rain. New elms bent low, appeared
arthritic, while an older oak was cleft
in two. The leaves of trees were thrashed and sheared,
but now you'd never know, for all is green
and lush (though tropic-humid). This is how
the wild rebounds: at lightning speed, unseen.
It takes its lumps, accepts what is, and plows
on through. Remind yourself this afternoon:
twelve months ago this place looked like the moon.

iii.

“Twelve months ago this place looked like the moon,”
a neighbor claims. He’s right, for runways stretched
from east to west—no place green could commune.
The airport’s gone, a ghost forever etched
on this locale, despite the lakes, the park,
the trees. A land repurposed with new life,
where asphalt once prevailed as flat and stark
as Abilene. “I’m glad,” declares his wife,
“they left the tower,” all the more run-down
in contrast to the new environment—
but nothing stays the same. And when they frown,
bemoan how children grow too fast, lament
the changes, it’s themselves they most think of,
the lives they’ve left behind, the haunts of love.

iv.

The lives they've left behind, the haunts of love
and death, reseed the next. A butterfly
among the firewheels, a mourning dove
in prairie grass, the bees' sweet draw and sigh:
indeed, there is a reason. Busyness
abounds, the work gets done: decay, rebirth,
from germ to root to stalk. From no to yes,
from down to up, the plants rise from the earth
in cornucopia. They don't need us
to profligate; they're wanton as the wind.
They spree and spread, almost adulterous
in their abandon. Some get lost, rescind
their lot, while others stretch for lives hard won,
their hopeful faces following the sun.

v.

Their hopeful faces following the sun,
the *helianthus* smile from ear to ear.
On torsos lean and tall—near skeletons—
they swivel necks, their skulls as cavalier
as shower heads, but not a drop in sight.
The sun has switched into that brutal phase
these flowers laud, a parish of bright light.
The hidden in full view: the seeds' arrays
are known to spiral to the right and left
in Fibonacci sequence (not that I
would stop to count—leave that to those more deft).
I'm nonetheless impressed—that yellow eye
that looks at me is not to be outdone:
it's good to know that some things dote on sun.

vi.

It's good to know that some things dote on sun,
but so does melanoma. Cancer's not
enough to keep me from a daily run,
yet it is always on my mind. Besot
in lotion, prepped for basting, I am drenched
before I leave the house. As heat cranks up,
the sweat pours down; my hapless throat, unquenched,
goes dry as dust—and still I don't give up.
The ducks have all flown north; they seem to show
more sense. I'm fending off a dizzy spell
not half-way round the lake. The sun's my foe,
this angry god; I'm hearing cancer's knell.
I choose to run the risk of death's flambé;
I turn the bend, continue on my way.

vii.

I turn the bend, continue on my way
past scrawny sycamore and feathered cypress,
but catch a whiff of fountain's fishy spray,
a tiny solace. Languid sluggishness
prevails: it's Houston-humid, Brownsville-hot.
The slouch toward summer's here—and no escape
in sight. I search around but not a spot
of cover to be found, no cool to drape
the trail. These trees too young, and me too old,
perhaps to see them age. I'd like to grow
along with them, to hear their tales unfold,
to witness history, but this I know:
our time is brief; some rise and some succumb;
the trees are many; some day shade will come.