

YOUR GARDEN - 'ONE GOOD PLACE'

(For Esther de Waal)

by

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Was it a wind,
ahead, held back
by a cluster of trees
from your sunny lawn,
your tall anemones?

From stone to slippery stone
I followed you down
until we could witness
that long white water
moving, motionless.

Such a deep cut!
Time wearing down
the land and cleaning
the hidden rock,
letting water go

from sunshine to darkness,
then making it fall
further, changed,
for a spell, from see-through
to wind-voiced brilliance.

How smoothly it bends
on the rim above,
how silently winds
around slabs below,
as if innocent of this:

the free fall
that holds, for a spell,
our bodies breathless,
filled a moment
with air-bright water.

Uphill, they met:
two streams, each
a flow out of darkness,
winding on each other
like voices singing.

They've worn a circle
in the high bank -
a potter's thumb
resisting the spin,
making space open.

Too fast to move on,
the waters spiral.
We watch some leaves
buoyant but yellow,
not yet drowning.

From the pool's edge,
clear water seeps
secretly among pebbles.
Two dippers flit.
As fish did, once.

Today, polluted,
the water's lifeless,
except for its own
lapses, its own
falls and stagnations.

These are its music,
its almost human
chanting, its almost
human leap
into thin air.

But this is a small
ordinary stream,
no more than rain
on a part of its journey
from sea to sea.

Not a human metaphor.
A secret elegance
in the ways of matter.
Whatever it is
heart-breaking, holding.

Glimpses. A touch
through eye or ear
of something Other.
Clench before it - terror.
Open in it - oneness.

I recall you turning
away, to your garden,
the task practical -
a new place for compost,
a new place for burning -

while the two streams,
their various voices,
hold as in a bowl
your open rooms
(a rush of stillness)

and the slumped side
of Holy Mountain
utters its cry
of astonished silence.
Mourning. Praising.