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Picnic in a Meadow

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"What father, if his child asks for bread,
would give a stone? Or if the child asks
for a fish, would give a snake?"
—Matthew 7:9–10

Sitting on our gingham blanket
under the shade of trees by a lake,
my grown daughter asks for bread.
I reach in the packed wicker basket,
touch a stream-smoothed gray stone
I picked up on a picnic last summer
by a creek in the Blue Ridge and kept.
Recalling the parable and thinking
I'll make a clever joke, I bring forth
the stone and my daughter asks,
"You have a snake in there too?"
One-upped, I beam as she blithely
devours a hunk of baguette slathered
with brie and fresh apricot preserves.

1. Richard Jones is the founding editor of *Poetry East*. He has taught at DePaul University in Chicago since 1987 and is the author of more than a dozen books of poetry, including *The Blessing: New & Selected Poems* (2000, Copper Canyon).

THE END OF PRAYER

Hosts of birds crying
in the red and yellow trees—
the woods are singing!

That's the haiku that consoled me
this autumn morning in the forest
as I walked in anxious meditation,

trampling down a dirt path,
my downcast eyes blind
to the forest's promise of change,

my unhappiness oblivious
to sundrenched crowns golden overhead.
How far did I walk, gazing inward,

rehearsing grievances, wounds,
praying for grace, the breaking of chains,
the renunciation of despair?

With my ramble near exhaustion
and me lost in woods a long way from home,
the rejoicing trees grew louder and louder—

the unseen birds
worshipping in the flamboyant branches
impelling me to join the day's triumphant song.

WONDERS

The Nobel poet claims nothing
greets us when we die,
we simply slip into a void
of emptiness and nonexistence,

entrusting all the world's
finite pleasures to the living,
who crave distraction to escape
the despair of this desperate life.

Her poem reminds me to praise
the warm breeze and cut rose
that lifts me out of the pit
and saves me from myself,

but praise makes me wonder
where the breeze comes from
and who painted the fleeting petals
such an enthralling, delicious red.

Whom to thank for the kindly
sent breeze that caresses me,
the dew's decree and command
that the roses burn brightly at dawn?