

John Grey

Forest Fire

At the rim of the forest fire,
deer bounded clear like jackrabbits.
Other creatures weren't so fortunate.
Like the possum, a prisoner of its own slow speed
and the field-mouse with too great a faith
in the protection of a tiny hole in the ground.

The conflagration was terrible but necessary,
said the experts.

The old and weary is burnt off
so the new can emerge.
The raccoon doesn't want to hear that.
Its body, fused to an oak branch,
is charcoal black.

Clouds break and rain aims its hoses
at the flames.
They're dosed with a great hiss.
The ground is scorched.
Every tree stump is dark and dripping.

Then, when the weather's done,
raptors move in.
They see it all from their high perches
in the rocky splendor,
then cash in on
the good deal nature's done them.

My lasting image is of a hawk
soaring from the burst blisters
of an oak branch
up to the nest
to feed its newborns.

Terrible but necessary, I thought to myself.
But that didn't make me an expert.

Intruder

Dark trees bend toward
each other's reaching limbs,

so that the trail beneath
is like the aisle of church

with distant moonlight
as its pale yellow altar.

No stations of the cross though,
merely a hooting barn owl in the eaves

and field-mice darting in and out
of thick-brush pews.

With each step, I wonder
if I'm about to witness

a modern day rewrite
of Eliot's *Murder In The Cathedral*.

But the owl, disturbed by my presence,
lifts off in one smooth motion,

flies in search of more secular fare
and the rodents, mistaking me for a predator,

scurry back into their holes.
As always, my presence in a church

disrupts the natural order.
No, the ceiling doesn't collapse.

But wind picks up,
rustles the makeshift rooftop.

And don't think I don't notice.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident. Recently published in *New Plains Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Gargoyle* and *Silkworm* with work upcoming in *Big Muddy Review*, *Main Street Rag* and *Spoon River Poetry Review*.