

Lost Dream

by Mark Reep

It's a song you knew once, begin to remember now: You've had this dream before. Diminished, worn thin, day leaking through the cracks, it's still offering you something, something you want badly to get this time. Squinting against the changing light, you glimpse a graceful unbroken arc these canted columns might have attained once, but when you thumb through your sketchbook, it's filled with vaguely algebraic equations in a fine slanting hand not your own—No, they're somewhere else, on the wall of some men's room, over the roaring useless hand dryer. Even the charred curling margins are dense with it, slashed blue signs as unknowable as Elvish turning sideways but never slowing, no room, no time to get it all down. You wish whatever's brought you here again would come to you like that now, but already you've forgotten what you saw, your pen's emptied, makes only scratches. A gull cries your name; startled, you glance up—No, it's a bluejay

taking flight now from the sill. You lie blinking at a gray winter morning, still feeling the warmth of a kinder sun burning through thin curling mist. Later, you'll be shaken by a sudden nameless grief, a sense of needful opportunity lost. For now though, a stairtread creaks, comfort enough—The ghost, you know, of a cat you still miss: He's heard you stirring, flown effortlessly up the steps, scratching insistently at the door. When you pick him up, his fur is cold, smells faintly of clean sheets aired sweet on the line. At the window, he's content to let you hold him for awhile, watch the birds bickering at the feeder. Out at the Junction, a jake brake bellows, a coal bucket slows for the turn.

