

View from the Bridge Over Finch Creek

Some move through the deeper pool
without stopping while others
pause to gather strength
for the shallows ahead.

Those that make it over
the gauntlet of stones buried
by water that would not wet
a cuff thrashing their tails
mightily making waves
further churning the cascade
and dousing the protruding faces
of the larger rocks bearing
silent judgment of the struggle.

I join the mute approbation,
a living stone of carbon and water,
as they take turns at the trial.
To my azoic friends and me,
unschooled as we are in nuance,
their successes or failures seem
mere quirks of happenstance,
the Crass Causality of Hardy's
purblind Doomsters, unmoved
by our calculi of merit.

Some hurl headlong through
the pool attacking the shallows
with vigor and purpose
only to find themselves thwarted,
forward progress inexplicably stopped
and body pitched by the stream
back to the pool to rest
in a pocket out of the current;
others, already heavily mottled
and panting from exertion,
stare ahead disconsolate before
seeming to accept some fate
and then swim through without
trouble. No function of size
or experience (certainly not
experience – there is no
dress rehearsal for life)
can explain which will answer
the call they all hear

and which will slide sideways
to a slow death gasping
near shore tilted unnaturally
staring up at nothing.

If my friends and I could speak,
there could be no talk
of winners and losers,
no hushed murmurings
of dread and desire,
of fulfillment and failure,
since the same end awaits
all and when is now or then.

Lessons from such compact senescence,
whether of salmon or daffodils,
sadly pass largely unnoticed –
much less learned.

– Jeffery Greb
(previously published in *The Write Launch*)