

Flat Rock, September

Mark Tredinnick

IN THE POTHOLES, which know no floor my feet
Can find, the moments pool, while years disappear

Downstream, and time strains eras from the hanging
Swamps; it drums up aeons where they've slumped

In siltstone strata—and slips them like silk over skin
Where these two streams run a shallow skein over stone.

Eternity's made of moments that don't know how
To pass, and one of them's not passing here this late

September afternoon in the upper reaches
Of a long contagious year of the warming world.

Behind the scarp that wraps us round, the day
Is shutting down. Light swells above the waters

Before it falls behind the cliffs, and dusk
Is a vivid shrapnel raining down the amber

Air—a million flying things that rise
From figs and watergums to take the season's

Bait. These resurrected larvae, late
To lunch, launch, in the dying of the day,

A reenactment of flight's first spawning.
Our moment in the stolen stream, our little

Stay of time's quick flow, is overflowed
By a swarming metamorphosis, rank

=

On rank of life's insistence on itself,

Death's re-creation of the real. The stream was

My daughter's idea, and we raced the day along

The gravel track to arrive before it closed—

The road washed out on half the bends, and on

A hanging limb a whipbird, white headphones on,

One half of the sweetest antiphon that silence

Knows, a bird that makes a hideout of

Her song—and now my daughter swims the twilight

Waters, thick with Icarus bits, and she's trying

Not to breathe too many of the fallen

In. The dying's a calm and holy thing,

A meteor shower drowned and become a stranding

Of light, an ephemeral benediction upon

A stream—a litany of silences still strung

In my daughter's hair when she calls me in

To fathom, if I can, the deeps. Time plays

No favourites. Here or anywhere. Time passes

No judgment: she knows nothing of endings;

Nor ever begins again. And death's a space that's left

For life to fill. A slack that living stretches

Taut again. Later, I hear what my body knew—

Its reluctance to enter in: these are women's

Waters, this blithe cemetery, this nursery

Of flight, this river's bed, whose floor my falling

Refused to find. We steal the places from them-

=

Selves; we steal the river from the women

It blessed; the children it birthed; the dead.

At least let there be honour among us

Thieves. It is a second baptism, then, I sink,

A grateful fear I plumb, a blasphemy

I swallow swilling a prayer of gratitude

For a chance I had no right to hope would come—

To swim an evening river with my kids, to drop

As deep as I dare, still to find no end

To how far back the present moment

Runs. So much has had to end to let

This be. So let this be—this reprieve, this reprise—

The honour we bear, the penance we pay, the past.

Let us walk together, quick with coming cold, across

Flat rock, glad for lives that float a while yet.