

Appetite

“A sparrow is hunger organized.”

—Wendell Berry

I read the phrase and see back years
to our eager daughter, unaware in first grade
shed become *student*: animated
for the daily walk to school with her next-door friend
under oak and birch sidewalk kingdoms, rich
with green and yellow, leaves
kept moving by flocks of small birds.
On their way, they always bowed
to The King of the Corner: bright fire hydrant
they moved past with grins and solemn genuflect.

It's called that to this day in my family—
King of the Corner: the story-landmark
all the childhoods were mapped around:
don't go past the King of the Corner;
meet me at King of the Corner;
collect acorns across the street from the King, hoard them like gold
under the backyard slide.

With an appetite for space and surface and making,
they chalked their names and hopscotch grids
under bird sounds, held the neighbor cat back
in its high place on a car hood, lifted it,
hind legs dangling, into their playhouse after school.

Not blackboards in memory
from that season, only the yellow, the green,
the yellow, sun engraving edges of leaves,
King of the Corner a private overseer
to an age of brevity, energies organized
in color and light, now perceived
like a sparrow's swift flight
down the mind's zones of time.

—Dixie Partridge

*This poem won honorable mention in the BYU Studies 2011
poetry contest.*