

OLD PAINT RAG

Old paint rag stained with pungent turpentine
Into a frenzy of remembrances
Of storage shed in backyard
As 1,000 million gallons of water
Passed by in the creek
That streamed beyond the back of the house.
What remains? Those cliff hills
Of young adventurer who lived in the woods
That saved him in later life when destitute.
As ever, a pungent grease of a way wide swath
Of cloth of whites, greens, yellows, turquoise paints
With soot marks and the looseness of resinous glove
Whose well-worn jaws bite tenacious memory
Of what once breathed out of mouth as rainbow.
The smell lingers no matter the diligence
With soap and water and cleanser, an acrid tang
Of what was once a pure stream of watering passing
Continuously passing through the lives of those who
Ignored the passing except in play or flood,
Fearful of the smell of blood would undo us.
Nothing is wrong with the rag, I decide. The mantle
Is a place to hang works of art. Still,
I put it in storage for the foreknowledge
That it will be the last time I will ever see it.
Nothing is wrong with the rag or me.
Even 1,000 million gallons of water. I turn around

To face the life I always was that never can pass by.
Soft linen to any season to rub its kindness
On my cheek, reminding me what never leaves.