

WALKING TO MORNING

Daybreak acquires new meaning, ice forming
in the air, a scrim of edgy glitter
between me and the lodge. A single tap
could craze the sky like antique china,
could crack the pewter pond and maybe
my lungs. The stone chimney's exclamation
of smoke rising above contemplated fire tongues
pulls me back through the forest.

What hauled me out at such an hour?
"Poets have haunted heads," said the man
from Maine. Other winter vacationers laughed,
toed last night's hearth, sipped espresso
as several of us talked of Thoreau
beside postprandial orange coals,
and conjured up long meadow hikes with him.

Pitch pines in white fur designer coats
signaled at my waking window, smilax boasted
vermilion berries above new snow:
an ineluctable invitation at first light.
The transcendentalist may never have left
a footprint here but it's his kind of place.

Metaphor, irony, verity weave me in, make me
forget the chill, slow my steps, quicken me.
An old lightning-bitten hickory bole leans
its solitary death over an inanimate stream.
Lichen-tweedled, burlled, its deep-rooted stance
communes with the creek's stymied voice.

Summer is concocted between them. Water
and recycling wood make green plans
not for themselves. This is why I came.