

Smoke

rises above the house, beyond weatherboards that will not hold paint
against the sun's seasonal slap, against which in turn is posed
all manner of protection upon the girl and the boy who run in the yard.
Autumn, the wood stacked, they run round and round all the world
they have known: flax, lemonwood shading out the saplings
of the self-seeded oak, the tree whose cherries, like the greengage plums,
like the apricots in the tallest branches, feed the strange birds that land
among these very lines, which will not contain what won't be captured:
the smoke of a wood stove whose hunger must be fed
and fed, season after lean season, a nervous eye cast over
vanishing arcs of wood. The wish to release and keep, security
and diminishment inextricable. See it rise over the yard where the girl
chases the boy until they round the house older than they have
a right by memory to be. See the tui flit through their lives,
the fantail in the garden, the sheep in the paddock, and here again
from around the house the boy and girl come running in tears,
come running in laughter, must be told to slow down, take it easy,
come to bed, get up, draw a bath, be nice. It rises higher
as though buoyed by the collective breaths of those mowing many lawns
in patterns so diffuse and contradictory as to belie all sense of what
from the ground are called paths. Become its rise until the yard
is a stamp, the shape of a map of the past, where a man forever sits
wondering how he got to a place he will never understand but to which
he has given all he had to give: a smoke that is renewed
even as it gives part of itself to the vagaries of the winds
with all their many monikers, the currents that carry what must be carried,
a smoke whose ungraspable tendrils, the definition of haze,
nevertheless hover or float in what from a distance seems
for a tantalizing moment to hold the solidity of shape,
before dispersing itself over the oral history of the firehouse,
the archeological layers of the schoolyard, past the orbs
piled in their glowing prime in the bins of the market garden,
then, if only as a scent beyond sensing, across to parts
unknown, like the boy and girl, the backs of their heads,
faces hidden in the shadow cast by a future only they
will know, will follow one another into, what you want,
what you don't, past the gate that will not contain what must
move beyond our will to hold it still, and close.

BRYAN WALPERT