Poems by Clinton Larson

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The Coming of Winter

A gust preens the hedgerow,  
And cold intervenes in the flow:  
A cornstalk is borne in a field  
And pirouettes against a shield  
Of light over snow, where it leaps  
Skyward into rain; a peak sleeps  
In light, then vanishes in the steel  
Dark, hidden in storm, the feel  
Outward, white wires in the cold.

Deputy's Report

I came from the windward side of the peak,  
Where wraiths of shadows rise over ledges  
And toss away into the rolling air.  
Then I reined and rode down the northern ravine  
Of Malad Pass, over drifts of snow, to Jake's  
Cabin. I had remembered his guilt and tousled  
Worry, as if he had arisen suddenly  
From a dream of bearing south over canyons  
Of the Colorado where the breath hovers  
In awe before you move to feel the canyons  
Of being. For day closes like that,  
Gulfs beyond and glimmering the shades  
Of evening in the mauve light as you wait  
On the bluff of your spirit, seeing no way.

He waited at the door, grisly in the dark cold,  
Evenly calling to me: "Arthur! Is it you?"

*Dr. Larson is a professor of English at Brigham Young University.
I said. "Yes," beside the snow-dusted logs
That wisped frost gathering like a hand
And making strands of bark stiffen angular
And sharp, like flint.

He asked into the darkness:
"Why have you come? To fetch me home to Malad?"

"No. To see if you were well. You haven't come in
To spend the winter. The nights of a mile
And a half high can seep into the mind like winds
Over the rock slopes above the pass and keep you
Here."

"Why have you come? Carswell died
Across my line, on my fence that he ripped down
And pulled into my grain."

"It will not do,
Jake. Come in as you honor the crest of grain
That shapes and mellows the hill you keep.
Gather the peace of gulls wandering
Against the clouds."

"I will die for what I've done.
No."

And he turned like a shouldering steer
Into a stall, his gait rolling him forward, face
Set misshapen, worry in a devotion of pain
That he knew must end. Then he looked back,
To catch my resolve like a rock thrust up
And cragged like a Fury killed. He drew his question
Into him and kept it there as he closed
The door. The lamp dimmed, coasting out,
And around the cabin the cold seethed darkly,
The cabin itself like an outcropped boulder.
Then a bullet slammed into the silence, the sound
Muffling over the new snow.

I found his body,
My hands fumbling for a wick to light,
But touching him coldly in the darkness.
I stepped back into the open doorway.
"Jake?"

And the grass beyond the room
Rose before the wind, freezing, gathering
Lobes of frost in the light of my mind.
Autumnal

Frost visits a pall mid-air; the upland mists
Hush silvering whitelowd into a cottony patina
Of evergreens; a round and luminary moon persists
Through drifting halos of weather. A concertina
Wheezes in the hollow’s musicale of firelight:
Schottische or dancing in the square, a voice
Calling home, and the star of hands slight
The dark reverence of shadows, as if the choice
Of a saucily tossing head moving and flaring red
Upon red out of flame as the firefly sparks
Ascend, swirl, and flicker out. But what sped
Across the ebon mantle of vales, across parks
Of hoarfrost fields and lawns, riding on light?
Down in the caves of Walpurgis autumn’s dark
Is the mirroring spring where wizards plight
Their fell secrecy, whispering: hounds bark
Miles away, inquisitive in brambles and sedge
For some white fur, and a thin scream wanes
In a rustle of leaves. What oath or pledge
Repines in the mindlight of autumn and reigns
In me as I scan these still meadows of night?
Am I the daemon I strike from the imperium
Up the sky, far east, or the entailing fright
I smooth in me, primeval in my cold delirium?