

The Unnamed Bird

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The long notes of the *adhan*
brush the face of sleep.

All the garden birds of Attar
praise the golden lining
of morning:
doves moan,
kingfishers excite the air
with flutes.

Swifts twitter
as they unstitch the darkness.
The mountain drops its cloak.

Yesterday, sky cupped me
in its open palm, as I stood
on Kinabalu's broad back
there was no drop.

The lower slopes hung
in a net of cloud,
sea polished its jewels,
fourteen-thousand feet below.

Only when mist rises
to wrap its veil around the peak
do you understand
God survives up there
on sips of air.

¹ Kathryn (Kate) Rogers has twice been short-listed for the Winston Collins Best Canadian Poem Prize by *Descant Magazine* (Toronto) in January 2008 and February 2009. Her poetry, essays and reviews have been published in anthologies and literary magazines in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Canada, the US and the UK. Rogers currently teaches in the Division of Language Studies at the Community College of City University in Hong Kong

Shuffling down the slippery stone
I could no longer watch the sky,
but there were buttercups at my feet,
gold in the seams of rock face.

We climbed at night
to meet the sun
on top of the mountain.

Descent seemed a slow and steady
certainty until the first cliff,
the rope I trusted
with gravity
even as a chasm loomed
ninety feet below.

On the climb the headlamp
showed me my feet.
Night swallowed the drop.
I followed a trail of lights
to a new constellation.

Descending, the bite of the rope
suddenly mattered
to my cold-numbered hands
in their borrowed skin
of wet leather.
Wind blinded me with my own hair,
tugged at my coat,
hissed about the fall.

Leaning out ninety degrees
I slid boots into cracks
fit for the toes of children.

Between my feet the drop
gaped:
'Give me your bones,' it whispered.
'I will use them to pick my teeth.'

All the way down
to the tree line that knife
sharpened its edge in me.

The first bird I saw –
preening on a sinewed branch
– had no name.
Then a flock flew in,
singing rainbows,
their colours beyond words.

Alone, Birding the Mountain

*All the birds have flown up and gone;
A lonely cloud floats leisurely by.
We never tire of looking at each other,
The mountain and I. – Li Po*

It waits outside my door every morning.
I decide to climb the slope to the bus,
though there is another way.
My muscles stretch, long as breath
as I rise against gravity.

Its core is hollowed for a tunnel,
to bring acceleration,
a train to this slow terrain.

Its slope of broken shoulder
rests beside me every night.
We share a bed,
but do not touch.

The phone rings: a friend wants to know
what ‘the little birds in olive drab’ are called—
the ones with the white eye ring
of constant surprise.

I explain that for me
birding is art – not science.

Blue magpies burst from treetops,
splash the sky indigo, trail tails
too opulent for this town.
Their bills and feet blush red
as they clutch the railing
round the parking garage.
As if they knew they are too elusive
to be real.