

JONATHAN WERTHEIM-SOEN
RUNNER-UP

Fragments from the Book of Place

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“Not an absence but an overcoming
of speech” you said of the quiet
of this place A noise
beyond noise
from the carpentries of the young
chairs transcending
formlessness and the children
ushered into language
laughing
for having avoided
violence so long
they approach and are rewarded
with hands

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Fog and the head of our daughter
new to this century searching
the ground that there is
a ground. We arrive
at night through the harbor. The mind
looks for a street—That openness
at the limits of a body
which makes us more than a family a race
they say though they are
alone. To enter a city. But to place oneself
daily on a pavement without a science
of walking? The birds
choose it and choose it
and they are alone

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Simpler simpler the huge fact
of the sea where we lived once
as one lives facing
a decade smoking reading achingly
numerous though we were poor
in world: the buildings
and the small lives
framed thereof the blessed
sound of desires quieted
by stones

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The pine sways and is its swaying. We brought
fruits and language with us
but are locked out oddly oddly
unlooked for. A consciousness
as young as ourselves that shaped the cities
around happiness as if by mistake
one would enter and forgo
all movement. Our hearts
on the grass and the crickets testifying
ceaselessly the small intervals
in which emergencies rest

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The way a car makes itself known in a field.
For a moment the animal stares—
and forgets. What was to be feared
fear itself merely
the time it takes to disengage
the eyes. Clarity
not truth but the point in which
the mind breaks and is
forgiven. We need to speak now
as if for the first time meaning is ours
to make