

## *Two Poems*

JAMES LONGENBACH

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### *The Academy*

Reluctantly, having returned to the very neighborhood  
I'd once called home, I was staying at a small hotel.  
I tied my tie, untied it, then tied it again.  
I took the elevator to the lobby, exited  
The revolving door, but the longer I walked

♦

The less attention I paid to detail.  
The city's accretions, the shops, the people who frequented them,  
No longer distracted me from the underlying contour of earth,  
Which rose precipitously, then fell away,  
So that just by walking forward, walking straight,

♦

Suddenly I saw for miles, and then,  
Without adjusting my goal, saw only my feet.  
One minute I stood at the edge of a great escarpment, overlooking  
the sea.  
Then rocks I'd climbed gave way to a level plain,  
There were fields of lavender, and in the distance

♦

What appeared to be a monastery perched at the top of a hill.  
I took off my jacket, I loosened my tie;  
I was anxious about getting lost.  
But time had taught me only too well  
The impossibility of attaining in the world



The world I'd known, as Proust says in *The Past Recaptured*.  
He's at the party at the house of the princess, it's been a long journey,  
And he speaks of himself, unthinkingly,  
As a young man, which makes everybody laugh.  
When I arrived at the Academy at the top of the hill



I found my place card, took my seat.  
I ate the appetizer, then the main course, and like everyone  
I endured the ceremony at which many names  
Were called, including finally my own.  
The phrase *a young man* is one my mother might have used,



My mother for whom I was still always a child.  
And if, as I heard my name, I registered certain changes  
Which had taken place since childhood,  
I judged them from the perspective she did,  
One thing having followed another



Unpredictably, but with purpose.

*One Last Thing*

This morning, which began like any morning,  
My wife went running with the dog.  
She tied her sneakers, secured the collar around his neck.

After they'd disappeared into the woods, the dog,  
As was his habit, stopped to pee.  
My wife looked off into the branches, which were laced with snow.  
And though the leash was tight in her hand,  
The collar fastened to the leash,  
When she looked back the dog was gone.

How could she come home without the dog?  
How could she explain not simply that he'd run away,  
But that he'd vanished,  
No shadow, no narrative,  
A smudge of white against white snow?

Truthfully, I witnessed none of this.  
But I can attest to the fact that when she returned,  
The dog was trotting beside her.

No conclusions; observations.  
I brewed the coffee, retrieved the paper from the stoop.  
Without dislodging a single flake,  
A cardinal settled on a branch.

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