

Catharine Lucas

ON READING KOLBERT IN THE NEW YORKER

(“Climate of Man”: April 25, May 2 & May 9, 2005)

I read. I understand. The stunned mind, the deepest intuition
agree at last -- how little time remains of business-as-usual
before the tip into unfathomable change.
Once believing, I begin to weep at night
with sharp accepting grief
as when an irreplaceable friend
is terminal before her time –
Nothing to do but place her in
a pocket of the heart where dear things go to be
best loved before they're lost –
finger more tenderly what is sliding from the grasp
when life reveals its other face:

The stone god wears away
My tears do not restore its cheeks, its lips.

Today I greet the rising cliffs
down Highway One, Pacifica to Monterey.
You are still here! I sing. And ocean, You! Slate dark and flat
under a quiet sky. A gray day, but not a world in mourning.
Cascades of dark gold monkey flower, pale yellow lupine,
crowd the dunes; at Lobos, half-lit
silver sea stars glow in sandstone crevasses.

Uniformed in my blue Prius, 50mpg,
I drive 300 miles, anyway – carrying
my unbearable knowledge to a cabin in the redwoods
where I write a poem of farewell and thanks:
The Guest to the condemned Host.

At Big Sur Inn, they serve organic local strawberries.
I taste each one, entirely, as suggested in the literature.
Dogen says, Death does not impede Birth.
Birth does not impede Death. It is possible to behave
as if this is so.

Grief is a brief abode, a refuge not a road.