

Michael McDowell

Cape Horn in October

Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area

This scree slope of basalt bricks
at the first ground wave of subduction
could come to life, lift its shoulders,
and somersault into the Columbia.

But I pick my way across the flat wrinkle
trail builders have drawn across the slope.
The rocks hold still at the angle of repose.
Today only golden leaves let loose and fall.

Deciduous trees glow like gold nuggets
sprinkled on the green velvet of coniferous hillsides.
I take photos at every turn of trail,
flutter of wing, and slither of snake.

When seismic events of old age
tumble me from cliffsides
to indoor ellipticals and treadmills,
or an armchair and cane or walker,

in the fogs and frosts of that far-off day
I'll scroll my way through screens
of maples and alders turning sunlight yellow
and gilding green moss on rocks.

Now while I can, I kick along the leaping
waves of curled dry leaves on narrow trails,
free as the peregrines who nest on basalt perches below,
these few days before winter's icy winds take hold.