

Michael McDowell

On the Timberline Trail

Elk Cove gives us April and May in August:
this north side of the mountain
goes backwards in time from the valleys below:

Our lawn has been brown for a month,
our rhododendrons stressed in the afternoon sun,
the clay soil as dry and hard as a kiln-bisqued pot.

But in this high basin the creeks race
glacial-melt chocolate brown
and wildflowers nod approval of mile-high views.

In the alpine breeze creekside monkeyflowers wave pink and yellow,
avalanche lilies across the meadows hang demure heads:
We have it good here, they know.

And lupine, paintbrush, gentian—
the flowers soak up the colors and concentrate them into a thousand
spots of pink, red, purple, blue, yellow, and white.

The evening's alpenglow makes magic all who watch
mountain snow turn pink
and radiate color long after sunset.

After breakfast we hike higher up a creek for clear water,
and cool off in the mouth of an ice cave.
We are in Oz, Narnia, Neverland, Middle Earth.

On our hike out not even the ice water
of Coe and Compass creeks
can wash the magic from our feet.