

Birding in Belize

On Christmas eve, our guide stops for directions
in a Mayan village. A boy gets in, face dripping,
hair wet. He sits nervous and poor
on the bench seat. He points the way.

On the mountain road we meet a man
with china blue eyes wearing simple clothes.
He drives a low wooden cart pulled by a horse. In back,
a pig for slaughter twitches in a tight wooden cage.

Our truck gets mired in the upper valley,
sinks to the axles. The air feels warm in the sun.
Mud everywhere. We haven't seen anyone in hours.
Plants and trees and quiet hold us,

and the world becomes very old.

But a man with quick brown eyes appears
on a bicycle, carrying a machete. He cuts bamboo,
braces our wheels, pushes. Tires spray him with mud,
and we spin free, give him a generous tip.

We wade a river to a Mennonite clearing.
The men building a school stop to talk,
they lean on their shovels, hatted, bearded,
in gray or green or blue cotton overalls.

Yes, they saw the scarlet macaws this morning.
They point the way there. Christmas red, the birds fly
without bobbing, as if on rails, squawk,
their long tails trail behind like flat cars,

a world born in each of their yellow eyes.

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Atlanta Review, Spring/ Summer 2018, p. 10