

ALICE DERRY

Reprieve

This horned lark climbs
the small hillocks of fescue,
then descends into dirt valleys,
where grass hides it. Then up.

I want it to turn toward me,
show its secret V black vest
so I can say, *Horned lark all right*,
but it is doing the necessary, seeds and
small beetles, the path laid out for it
by them, in their own, not willed
but not random, even smaller
paths, keeping course without a name.

This is what you taught me: ridge walks,
start high and stay high.
Although between us was only
mountain air.

Today, as if I were with you, harebells
purple the hills, signaling the end to bloom.
As if you were still here—
Olympus on one side, Needles the other.
Zero chance of rain.

Some days a door opens.
Others, it's the simple emptiness of the universe.

The nearer firs, then the farther, then
into the valley, up the next ridge, valley,
until they are only color, blue and
faded blue.

I had to fight for my ten minutes
with your body.
I was still crying, no, still trying
to overcome who knows what
to get myself to reach out and touch you.
Your hair soft, able to be brushed aside.
To do what the ages have done: lay my wet,
breathing lips
on your stone skin, muster you once more
in the salvaged jacket you'd worn to a rag.

The sheriff wanted me away from you.
And what good would it be to stay?

Along the ridgetops, above the tree line,
where, starting high, you felt
you'd gotten back some of the unfairness
the world had dealt you.

Along the ridgetops, nothing hedging you in,
where rock buckled and heaped
as one plate shoved against another,
only lichen beginning the long disintegration.

The air unencumbered but not dead,
its right combination of invisible elements
feeding our lungs.

Alice Derry's fifth volume of poetry, *Hunger*, appeared from MoonPath Press in 2018. Red Hen published *Tremolo* in 2012. In manuscript, *Tremolo* won a GAP award from Washington's Artist Trust. *Strangers to Their Courage* (Louisiana State University Press, 2001) was a finalist for the Washington State Book Award. Raymond Carver chose Derry's first manuscript, *Stages of Twilight*, for the King County Arts Award. Derry has also published three chapbooks, including translations of Rainer Maria Rilke. In 2013, with Tess Gallagher and others, Derry organized a celebration for Raymond Carver's seventy-fifth birthday, at which she gave the keynote address. In April 2017, Derry was Peninsula College's seventeenth Writer in Residence. Derry lives and works on Washington's Olympic Peninsula.

ROBERT CHIARITO

Sicilian Trilogy Panel 2, 2017
Oil on canvas, 72 x 60 in

