

WALKING UPSTREAM

Lloyd Ratzlaff

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PREVIEW

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I use not their tables, formulas, or schemes, rules and ways, for
I have not learned from them. I have another teacher, which is
the living fountain of nature.

— *Confessions of Jakob Böhme*, sixteenth-century shoemaker

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1
THE OLD PATH

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Prismatic Lens

Full double rainbow on the river's brink,
and below, faint imprint
of a third.

I count the colours, not sure—
are there only seven?

Each rainbow arcs down to the water.
No hidden pots of gold there,
only a halcyon sun bending with the waves.

Pelicans float under the great crescent,
small white arks on the river.

Pica pica

I spy a human on the trail
and think, here comes another member
of the god species,
while over there, without divine concepts,
comes a magpie
who handily outflies us both.

Magpie, I love you more
for your flight and strut
than for your
squawk,
but can't vilify a creature
ten times tougher than me
and a hell of a lot more handsome.

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The Realm

A king abroad in my kingdom,
small domain on neighbourhood streets
but mighty big at the riverbank.

Neither crown prince
nor enchanted frog,
a monarch of no account
who likes to hide sometimes
in a copse of aspens
and listen.

In the Reeds

Red-winged and yellow-headed blackbirds
announce my arrival
at the edge of the marsh
where coots and pintails and mallards swim.

*Hey hey,
whoever you are!*

They light on the bulrushes' woollen heads
and sway against cloudbanks,
all reflected in the swamp's green water.

Hey you
mud hen in the reeds,
so near yet so hidden,
only the tinks on some tiny anvil
betray the place of your nesting.

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[In the egg that hatches, an updraft. In the bird that flies, a stone.]

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Lloyd Ratzlaff is a former minister, counsellor, and university lecturer, author of three books of literary nonfiction, and editor of an anthology of seniors' writings and a children's book. He was a finalist for three Saskatchewan Book Awards, won two Saskatchewan Writers' Guild literary nonfiction awards, and served on the boards of several writing organizations. He was a columnist for *Prairie Messenger Catholic Journal* through its final nineteen years of publication and taught writing classes for Foundations Learning & Skills Saskatchewan, the Western Development Museum, and the University of Saskatchewan Certificate of Art and Design program. *Walking Upstream* is his first poetry collection. He lives in Saskatoon.

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