On His Seventieth Birthday
For Stephen Schmidt

JILL PELÁEZ BAUMGARTNER

On the morning
of your seventieth birthday
you say you feel that sick tug
of mortality, the reminder
that your roots are spring-thin
in this damp earth,
the reminder that green
shoots must break
seed shells in the stiff
push toward light,
the path dand and unfamiliar.

Your complaint: the road
veers off into deep water,
the pine-needled path
gives way to tangled brush,
and the still pond greens over.
The pattern, you say, is simple,
clear, unsettling.

To know the beyond,
sure and absolute, its lines
clean as right angles:
is this what you seek
or what you fear?

For you today it is enough
to say: The delicacy
of this flesh, finely grained!
The proud press of this thumb's
print! The exuberance
of this bald sheen! The joy
of the steady tread of this heel
and toe on pavement!

And the reminder
that when the pastor lifts
and breaks the wafer,
she also says, "Come!
For all is now ready!"

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