

Susan Demarest

Steller's Jay

On the way up Hillside Trail, which was,
obviously, a hill and also, slightly wet,
of course, I worried that I'd slip
not least because these things occur
quite naturally, and more,
because I worry that I'll die.

And I have never said "No worries,"
because there are: Is there another word
for time, how it is all slipping away?

But then I thought of photos that
I'd seen of steam escaping manhole covers,
the sideways gaze of train commuters staring down
the end of days, their faces drawn, their raveled lives,
their grim and empty waiting rooms,

and wished to take a photograph
that caught the steam of human *qi*, the drive
to board that train alone, to find an ersatz leather seat
and watch the houses rushing by, those slumping porches
by the tracks; how many times did they wake up inside the night
to hear *Acela* rushing by? Then woke again

to hear a symphony of warblers overhead
like mezzos in a drunken choir, now hushed
as I walked by, but now the redwoods broke above
the sky while sorrels edged the floor
and giant ferns spread out like tails . . . I closed my eyes.

are on journeys now. I can't sleep; my eyes hurt.

Susan Demarest, whose poems and CNF have appeared in *Hawaii Review*, *Tar River Poetry*, *Ibbetson Street Press*, *Antiques and Collectibles*, *Tell Magazine*, *Medical Literary Messenger (VCU)*, *Molecule: Tiny Lit*, *Hole in the Head Review* and other publications, lives on the North Shore of Massachusetts.