

# Two Poems

**Nathan McClain**

## Penelope, Birdwatching

A mockingbird alights,  
softly, on a branch  
that seems always to brace itself, ready

in case the bird takes flight  
or the bird decides to settle,  
which it never does,

or not for very long,  
but what can the branch do  
except wait—to be pared down,

to one day snap  
beneath the bird's growing weight?  
And what does it say about me

who, with binoculars, watches?  
(Is it wrong to watch?)  
What does it mean

if sometimes I feel haunted by an absence?  
Outside my apartment, the wasps  
sound as if they're humming

fragments of old hymns.  
Soon men with hammers  
and chisels in their tool belts,

men whose jawlines are dusted  
with plaster powder and sawdust,  
will come and take the hive away

and I'm afraid  
that I will miss the wasps  
and their song, but that's foolish.

I could say my heart is heavy,  
but what would that prove? Yes,  
my heart is heavy. And also feels empty.

Today there's a mockingbird  
on a branch, though I'm never sure  
whether it's the same

mockingbird, too hard to tell.  
Mostly because whenever  
you see one, it's singing

a different song:  
a blues.

***Landscape in Red* by David Siqueiros**

Whoever said that, with time, the forest behind  
the house would come back

lied—the forest still scorched  
with sorrow. If you sit in ash

long enough the residue gets in your throat;  
(odd to think you could carry

the dead forest around inside you for years)  
yet sometimes I'd go out back and sit

in what ash hadn't blown away.  
Before the fire, my father

left, angry. He went for a walk.  
That night, the forest caught fire.

Firemen said no one was to blame.  
But there's always someone.