**Under Walnut: Words for a Happening in Watson Park**

**Vidya Natarajan**

In the park under the walnut under two untidy nests where the squirrels raised their young in the spring

stepping on the thick paving of walnuts half green half black, people move, some watching the others, some watching others watching them, some watching inward

there are introductions—I am Louise I am Molly, thank you for coming, oh look how Lily has grown, oh hey Garrinche, long time

Billy Jack Douthwright’s ashes fall into the sweetgrass, walnuts, sumac, air of evening, soft grey arcs like music he made.

They are making a thing, a being together, and Ruth reads out what they must imagine—is there a tree inside them, is it spreading its roots

and Kevin’s voice now drifts from the speakers--is that tree reaching up is it growing is it leafing out is it

a woman in an orange shawl walks through the sumac’s flaring drapery through dense coxcombs of drupes, arms raised hands open fingers stiff with treeness

a Ducati leans one way and an electric bike leans towards it, like an old odd couple with a certain habit of tipping towards each other

Beyond the bikes Ruth dances, in a denim coat, her hat elegant, and Kevin dances, turning to the tent where Wormwood mixes strange electronic music

and Jim does breaks and Hannah does improv and Tom in his notebook scribes the scene

Family has come together in Billy Jack’s name, dancing Billy Jack back to the earth he came from

the children thread in and out of the group, grandmothers call out

a mother hold her child’s hand as he dips the sumac brush in walnut-stained water and draws brown swirls on the fabric stretched between the trees

two beautiful men—magnetized, they cannot be apart, you can tell--dance at first near each other without touching air-caressing then stop to kiss, Damon and Pythias, intertwining--sweet, singular moment

Marshall walks quietly among the bodies dancing and lying and swaying, intent focusing his camera

a dog barks and barks, and a man on the hill above the park roars

on tussocks of little bluestem smelling still of mud and river, still holding recent rain, I lie and look up

at the ragged wet nests, a hundred leaves a minute launching from the walnut’s twigs like clouded sulphur butterflies puddling

On my way home, in the river, I see a swimming shape among the tree roots—a beaver, perhaps—and I hang over the parapet, still heavy with the happening, wistful, straining to see.