

Eavesdrop

Samuel Wingfield-Karpowitz

Meaning first the water fallen
from the eaves, then the ground
to which the water has fallen.

And then meaning me, in its newer verb,
strolling the river behind a girl and her father.
Dull palette today: all muted tones
except for flecked beads of Hawthorn red.
Mushrooms like wild turkey feathers
flutter-shingle dark oak trunks, and the air
smells of chimney smoke, wet soil.

She alerts him that, across the water,
the rumpled brown plants are like
elephant ears. The pair walks slowly,
her stubby, dawdled steps, hand in hand.
What do you make of that, he asks her,
as if she is much older.

They might represent sustenance,
I suppose, father and daughter, how minds nourish
kindred minds, how we are fed
our ways of being. And they seem
to elicit a like symbolism

from the Middle English *eavesdrop*,
something about rainwater
dripping off an old slate roof
to saturate the soil, to be returned,
in time, to the sky, the eaves, the soil again,
and, by the early seventeenth century,
to a person listening.

Several seconds have elapsed
since the father's question: *Oh*,
his daughter says, *I don't know*, and sighs
as if she is much older.