

Connie Wanek

EVERYTHING FREE

The lake and sky were quarreling along the horizon:
late September. Whose fault was that?
The birches unburdened themselves
of the thinnest leaves in memory.

Where an old man had lived alone in quiet squalor
the yard was filled with boxes
and a sign: everything free.
He'd finally done as he'd promised;

he'd gone to Arizona to pan for gold.
People milled about, curious and disgusted,
and when every box had been overturned,
the shredded, chipped, tarnished, water-soaked, and smelly

goods determined to be irredeemable,
someone finally called the police.
The supply of clouds was inexhaustible, and the lake
had the sheen of titanium.

These were our riches.
There were gentler places to be poor.
People said he lived as he did because he was lazy
or lonely, but I believe

we all end up with what we really want.
Look around. You wanted this.
And I wanted one thing to remember him by
and took the sign.