

# The New Criterion

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## The clearing

by Jeffrey Harrison

I leave the trail, cut through the woods,  
and come to a bright clearing,  
its long grass luminous with dew  
and steaming—and everywhere, between  
the trees and bushes, spider webs,  
staring like weird translucent eyes  
(the spiders are the pupils).

A rotten tree trunk waves a flag  
of mist as thick as smoke.  
Lichen, the gray snow of decay,  
spotches the scraggly branches  
of dead spruces. And a few  
dying maples and birches lean.  
It's all barely held together

by this secret structure that the dew  
reveals, the otherwise invisible  
threads that pull the foliage back  
to make this opening. Break one  
and the whole thing could collapse.  
All eyes are on me.  
I must be careful walking through.

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