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Red-Eyed Vireo at Work

Polly Brown

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Red-Eyed Vireo at Work

A twig's grown to the left off a narrow branch:
from that fork, she suspends the nest's rim
using ribbons of birchbark, spiderweb.

Under the cover of new leaf, about twelve feet
off the ground, she works in, beak
by beakful, found stuff: plant stem fibers,

grapevine skin, more birchbark, caterpillar
silk, and a lining of dry red pine needles, layered
smooth. Bits of wasp nest paper, pearl and gray,

she tears from their abandoned nest, then glues
to her own nest's outer curves, to spook
jays, crows, squirrels, other thieves.

All this while her mate sings and sings to the sky,
thousands of songs per day. The finished bowl
surrounds a cavity maybe two inches wide

and nearly that deep; its form almost a globe.
In this small hope woven from scraps
and snatches, four spotted eggs crack open,

reveal bald scrawny bodies. Cold nights,
the nest holds them within their mother's
warmth, while their feathers grow.

Polly Brown

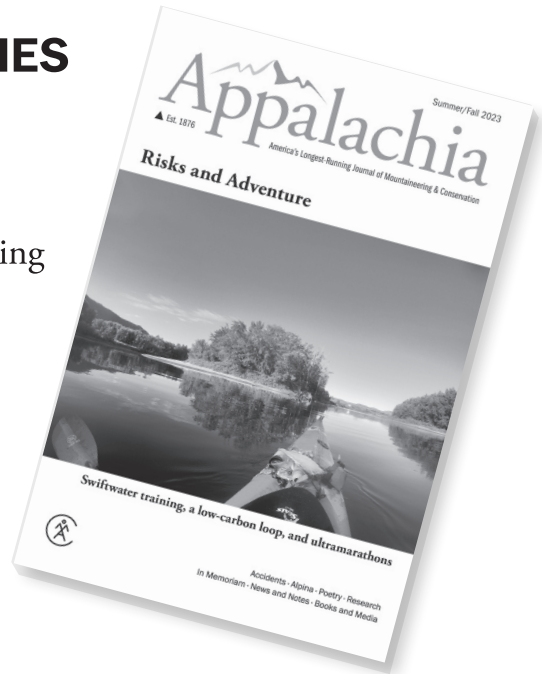
Polly Brown, author of *Pebble Leaf Feather Knife* (Cherry Grove Collections, 2019), has resettled a family place uphill from the Sandy River in western Maine. Other recent poems have appeared at quartetjournal.com and canarylitmag.org, and in the *Atlanta Review* and *Naugatuck River Review*.

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