

Simon Perchik

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It's not easy for charcoal  
--you wait for your birthday  
where speed is always painful

let the grill lay low  
till the air fits --this day  
must have been much wider

separate from wood, left over  
when some axe blew apart  
and branches headlong, torn out

burning to the ground  
--they don't see in the dark anymore  
can remember only its color

though the flames will never again  
come back, just the smoldering  
to torment your eyes and morning

--you slow this wreckage the way all lids  
are dropped face down, change direction  
covered with smoke, with days and holding on.

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Lifted too close this leaf  
fastens on your sleeve and dries  
--it must know why one ear  
hears sooner than the other  
forces you to turn and climb  
till there's nothing left  
to lose, the sun  
worthless, the air  
limping, poisonous

--you hold in your arm  
what every tree finds too heavy  
throws out and even in winter  
you pick up from there  
crumple your fingers till their bones  
want to live at the bottom  
but only one recognizes oak  
from when the moon fills up the sea  
drop by drop and your knuckles  
pounding against each other.

\*

Her ankle needs adjustments, puddles  
for runoff :tectonic coasts  
and one shove more

--she hasn't time to explain  
though the splash is almost invisible  
already summer the way each wave

migrates mile after mile and back  
--with just a leg she detonates the place  
for membranes and her reflection

till it erupts again, tilts the sun  
sideways and around her glistening heel  
just below the surface where the sky

somersaults from joy and expectation  
as if every rock that never made shore  
could be lifted in her arms

already singing again and her stride  
touching down on mountain streams  
--only water can understand this

broken in pieces :the path  
for continents, for step by step  
falling through the Earth.

\*

You lean against the way each evening  
fills this sink waist-deep  
though the dirt smells from seaweed

and graveyard marble --the splash  
worn down, one faucet abandoned  
the other gathers branches

from just stone and rainfall  
--by morning these leaves  
will lift a hand to your face

--you drain the weatherbeaten  
the mouthfuls and slowly the mud  
caresses your throat --you go

shaved and the gravel path  
sticks to your skin, flowing  
half shovel, half trembling.

\*

Its root right from the start  
unsure, poking side to side  
the way a calf will nudge  
and the thick milk underneath  
half summer sky  
half a little at a time  
though it's not raining

--you build the swing  
float an old clothesline  
knotted as if this branch  
would forget leaf after leaf  
its first Spring then another  
scattered in all directions

--you bunch from in back  
push so the flow when it comes  
is still warm, already breathing  
--your knuckles ache  
--it's been a long time.

This rope depends on straw  
and drying, holding on tight  
to the dark breasts  
hidden in the light between  
your fingers wobbling across  
the dead grass and continent

--it happens! your hands slow  
stumble to a stop  
and under the leaves  
falling painlessly, waiting for snow.