

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.

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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.

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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.

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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.